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Jack Whitten:
Black in America, Black in the World

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Jack Whitten:
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by

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For Marc Boiarsky, the Boiarsky Family, and Scott Moore.

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Abstract

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This thesis examines Jack Whitten's thinking about blackness and suggests that while Whitten's early works reflect his location of his blackness in the United States, his later works show him locating his blackness globally. Situating Whitten's painterly and sculptural interests within the social and political issues that remained so central to him, I analyze his approach to depicting Black political leaders and philosophers. I suggest that formal shifts in his artistic explorations reflect social and cultural shifts and his interpretation of those shifts on his own terms. In case studies of Whitten's *King's Wish (Martin Luther's Dream),* 1968, *Homage to Malcolm*, 1970, and *Atopolis: For Édouard Glissant*, 2014—all from distinct periods in the artist's life—I argue that Whitten explores his identity through the lens of significant Black cultural figures to whom he dedicates or "gifts" paintings. These explorations in paint, in turn, shaped Whitten's evolving self-conception from being Black in America to Black in the world. Combining close reads of these three works with Whitten's published interviews and conversations,

as well as selections from his studio log—where the artist describes important primary experiences—my work expands the existing scholarship by providing a new framework to think about the relationship between identity and painting in Whitten's work.

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Introduction

The Civil Rights and Black Power movements of the 1960s were an important part of my search for identity. They gave me the foundation to build my personal aesthetics.[1]

"Art is a manner of identity. I identify with the image. The image is a representation of my being. My worldview is incorporated within the image," wrote the painter Jack Whitten in a 1991 studio note.[2] In other words, Whitten saw his work as about identity, specifically his own. Accordingly, while his painting *King's Wish (Martin Luther's Dream)* [fig. 1] is a tribute to the preacher and civil rights leader, Whitten claims that this painting—and others from the series he dedicated to King, Jr.—is equally about his struggle with self-identity. It is an "earlier experiment where I dealt exclusively with the existential problem of identity," the artist stated.[3] Inspired by the writings of Carl Jung to tackle "the everyman question of who am I?"[4] the frenetic brushwork of *King's Wish* treats Whitten's interpretation of King's psyche near the time of his assassination, as the artist deals with exploring his own psyche as a Black man in the United States.

Such connections between painting and Whitten's exploration of identity and expression characterize his oeuvre until his death in 2018. Over the course of sixty years of his artistic career, Whitten moved from being an activist in the South to an Abstract Expressionist in New York to a Pan-Africanist sculptor in Crete to a global citizen. His paintings thus contain a worldview shaped by the Civil Rights, Black Power, and African Liberation movements; personal experience (such as important migrations from South to North and between New York and Crete); and ideological frameworks, including the postcolonial and globalization-era philosophies developed by Édouard Glissant. Where

King's Wish and other early paintings reflect an interest in Black American identity (what I hence call "Black in America"), later works, such as *Atopolis: For Édouard Glissant*, reflect Whitten's vision of a diasporically-located and ever-mobile global identity (what I call being "Black in the world").

By considering Jack Whitten's expressed self-identity together with his formal and technical experiments, this thesis departs from previously established and now-familiar frameworks that cast Whitten alternately and separately as a civil rights activist, a pioneer of non-relational and process-based painting, a global citizen or member of the African diaspora. Many writers lean on the artist's biography, drawing attention to his involvement in the Civil Rights Movement, as Kellie Jones does in *Witness: Art and Civil Rights in the Sixties* (2014) and Mark Godfrey and Zoé Whitley in *Soul of A Nation: Art in the Era of Black Power* (2018). Other scholars, such as Kelly Baum, Katy Siegel, and Kwame Anthony Appiah focus on Whitten's multiple national identities: a Black American from the South, a New Yorker, and a Greek resident with ties to Africa. Addressing his work's relationship with postcolonial theory, this second group of scholars focus on Whitten's connection to Africa and its diaspora through his sculptural practice, as the essays published in *Odyssey: Jack Whitten Sculpture 1963-2017* (2018) exemplify. Other authors focus on the artist's process-oriented practice with detailed descriptions of his materials and manipulations of acrylic paint, presenting Whitten's legacy as a pioneer of non-relational and process-based painting. This group includes Katy Siegel in *High Times, Hard Times: New York Painting, 1967-1975* (2006), Henry Geldzahler in *Jack Whitten: Ten Years—1970-1980* (1983) and Kathryn Kanjo in *Jack*

Whitten: Five Decades of Painting (2014), which details Whitten's career and personal life and charts by decade the evolution of his painting process and bodies of work from the early 1960s to the 2000s. Scholars, such as Richard Shiff, discuss how Whitten manipulates viewers' phenomenological responses to the work, drawing on the artist's interests in photography, science, mathematics, history, and music—especially jazz—and his love of world cultures. In his 2017 publication *More Dimensions Than You Know Jack Whitten, Paintings 1979-1989*, Shiff addresses Whitten's experimental abstraction, the phenomenological nature of his work as it relates to perception, and the influence of science, technology, and animist beliefs on his paintings. Beryl Wright in her 1990 publication, *Jack Whitten*, likewise addresses Whitten's intellectual pursuits.

Building on these studies, I consider how Whitten's conception of self and artistic practice consistently and dynamically evolved in tandem. Eschewing any single framework, I explore Whitten's paintings as an expression of his experience of blackness, first politically within the United States, and then as a global philosophy – drawing from insights about Whitten's readings in postcolonialism, his experimental techniques, and his interests in phenomenology. I depend on Whitten's studio notes, newly published in *Jack Whitten: Notes from the Woodshed* (2018), which provide insight into the people, events, and ideas that shaped his thinking and inspired his work. These studio notes express his thoughts, wishes, frustrations and observations on topics as diverse as identity, the art market, philosophy, travel, science, memory, and the black experience. Whitten's studio notes provide entry to the artist's perspective, enabling a discussion of how he associated identity with painting.

As I show, Whitten's paintings dedicated to important Black cultural figures, such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, and Édouard Glissant, are equally about Whitten. In the following three case studies, I argue that Whitten explored his identity in relation to these Black cultural figures, using *King's Wish (Martin Luther's Dream)*, 1968, *Homage to Malcolm*, 1970 [fig. 2] and *Atopolis: For Édouard Glissant,* 2014 [fig. 3]. These examples illustrate how Whitten's pictorial style and technique shifted in tandem with the ideas about black, national, and diasporic identity that King Jr., Malcolm X, and Glissant developed.

In Chapter One, "Black in America: Jack Whitten and MLK, Jr." I discuss how Whitten used a mode of figurative abstraction and highly charged palette in *King's Wish* to simultaneously unpack what he imagined were King's wishes and dreams in his final years and also to process his own identity crisis. I discuss how Whitten explores his psyche as well as King's (taking both as manifestations of Jung's "collective unconscious"). I suggest that for Whitten, *King's Wish* was a means to know himself and formulate a conception of self that differentiates between identities, in which he is a Black man, a Black American, and a Black American artist.

In the second chapter, "Jack Whitten and Malcolm X: Becoming a Global Citizen," I argue that in *Homage to Malcolm*, Whitten develops a formal language for expressing his and Malcolm X's Pan-Africanism. Following his first visit to Crete, where he began exploring his African roots through sculpture inspired by African art, Whitten's pictorial style radically shifts as he switches from oil to acrylic. Reflecting on this turning point, Whitten stated, "In 1970, I made a deliberate and conscious decision to start

experimenting with the possibilities of paint without imposing the added burden of psychological implications."[5] Relinquishing the paintbrush, Whitten adopted tools, such as the afro comb, in an effort to divorce himself from the influence of his "academy," Abstract Expressionism—and specifically the gestural technique made famous by Willem de Kooning—but also as a means to shift from a more personal and expressive mode characterized by the artist's hand, which *King's Wish* exemplifies, to something more universal, which he explores using new non-relational painting techniques in *Homage to Malcolm*.

Between 1970 and 1990, Whitten continued to experiment with acrylic as a medium, and in the interim developed his practice of 'paint as collage.' This discovery in turn sparked another major shift in his style, as he began to mold acrylic paint into tesserae, the technique he employed to create *Atopolis: For Édouard Glissant* in 2014. As I discuss in the third chapter, "*Atopolis*, a City and a Cosmos," Whitten gives visual form to Édouard Glissant's concepts of relation and creolization through his acrylic mosaic technique in *Atopolis*: his process parallels that of relation and creolization as he brings together myriad tesserae derived from diverse sources to create a new whole in a nonhierarchical fashion. In turn, I argue that Glissant's philosophical notions such as errance and relation-identity parallel Whitten's own experience and influence his evolving conception of self, which he likewise expresses in *Atopolis.*

In these three paintings (among others), Whitten worked on developing and expressing a continuously evolving definition of his identity, both self-developed and in

relation to emerging political identities. As he remarked in 1964, “Beneath every surface lies an identity.”[6]

Chapter 1: Black in America: Jack Whitten and MLK, Jr.

Urgent gestural brushstrokes cover Jack Whitten's 1968 canvas *King's Wish (Martin Luther's Dream)* to form three amorphous registers: the uppermost in fiery tangerines; the middle, a burning butterscotch; the lowest register in orchids, mauves, and lilacs. Darker marks in teal, black, cobalt, and sepia spread across this polychrome landscape, and these darker marks suggest ghostly faces. Though abstract, these faces are clearly raced with distinct facial features associated with whiteness and blackness. These faces' racial differentiation—seemingly painted at least some weeks after the fiery bottom layers—respond to the thoughts of the acclaimed civil rights leader, activist and preacher, Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., one of Whitten's greatest influences. Part of a series dedicated to King,[7] *King's Wish (Martin Luther's Dream)* was likely completed shortly before King's assassination in Memphis, Tennessee on April 4, 1968.[8]

This chapter explores how *King's Wish (Martin Luther's Dream)* merges the themes of Dr. King's wishes and dreams, related to race relations and the Vietnam-American War. Presenting these black and white faces as two distinct groups, Whitten highlights the inequity and the tenuous status of race relations that both he and Dr. King bore witness to during the 1960s. The white and black faces within *King's Wish* capture this racial divide, while the hot palette alludes to the violent struggles for civil rights in the United States and Southeast Asia. This chapter chronicles Whitten's history with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement, following his pivot from organizing protests and marches in the South to attending art school in the North, all the while following Dr. King as he shifted in the mid 1960s from tackling desegregation to

taking on economic inequality and white imperialism's global scale. The Vietnam-American War became a touch point for both Dr. King and Whitten, as King directly correlated the resources being poured into Southeast Asia to racism and poverty in the U.S.

These events and their effects shaped Jack Whitten, who was reconceptualizing his identity: as a man—a Black man—as an American, a Black American, and also as an artist: a Black American artist.[9] The subject of *King's Wish* is not only Dr. King's hopes, but Whitten's search for identity.[10] In other words, *King's Wish* reflects Whitten's notion in 1968 of what it meant to be Black in America. The second half of this chapter turns from discussing the content of *King's Wish* to addressing the painting as Whitten's exploration of his psyche. Whitten's interest in Carl Jung's *Psyche and Symbol* (1958), suggests Jung's theory of the collective unconscious as an interpretive framework for *King's Wish*. I draw parallels between the painting and what may have been on Whitten's mind at the time: psychoanalytic theory, notions of identity, race relations, and the Vietnam-American War.

Whitten's interpretation of Dr. King's thoughts in his final years

King's Dream: I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.[11]

Whitten's painting seems to capture something of King's thoughts because he depicts a sleeping man's head in the lower right corner, and this possibly represents King, particularly when one considers the painting's title. Whether King or not, the depicted man is dreaming on race relations and the Vietnam-American War. His prone head tilts

back into the canvas as if resting on a pillow. Eyes closed and mouth cracked open, the ghostly faces of black and white peoples flow forth from the top of his head to fill the canvas. A mauve line cuts diagonally from the middle right of the canvas across to the lower left, and this division of the composition suggests two landscapes: that of the waking world and that of the unconscious mind. Where blues, yellows and oranges suggest sky while mauve and magenta suggest ground, these may also connote the conscious mind and the unconscious. The images' proximity to the sleeping head, and doubled areas of the composition—the amorphous background and the surface layer of faces—suggest such a contrast between conscious thoughts, feelings, and memories, and the domain of the unconscious (a deeper mental state in which automatic skills and repressed memories are stored and dreams and fantasies occur). Black, teal, and yellow marks creep across the divide between the painting's two main areas, perhaps representing how during dreams ideas and images from the conscious mind seep into the unconscious. While it separates the two parts of the mind, the diagonal line also creates depth. Despite the canvas' flatness, Whitten's layering of washes and gestures suggests space both between layers as well as illusionistic three-dimensional space that moves from the dark areas around the sleeping head, tilted back, and the lighter background.

Claiming its subject as King's wishes and dreams via its title, the painting alludes to King's famous 1963 "I Have a Dream" speech, which expressed the hope that one day whites and blacks would live in harmony and equality.[12] Yet as Whitten began *King's Wish* just a few years later, in 1967 and 1968, these dreams seemed too far away, as King alludes in his critiques of continued systemic oppression through economic inequality

and the Vietnam-American War. In this sense, the Agent Orange-like tangerines and almost caustic chemical glow of *King's Wish*, as they foam beneath Whitten's arrangement of floating black-and white-raced faces, expresses what Whitten may well have interpreted to be King's thoughts. Or perhaps what he also felt himself of the state of race relations in the United States and Vietnam: a state in which blacks and whites were not working together as equals but were instead often at odds. The raced faces in Whitten's painting appear as opposing entities. Outlined in dark strokes, the black faces float atop passages of dark purples and teals. Whitten painted the white faces, by contrast, in burnt sienna atop pale washes that suggest fair complexions. In depicting their facial features, Whitten seems to be drawing on racial stereotypes to distinguish between the black and white faces: the black faces exhibit wider and more generous noses and fuller mouths—such as the face in the lower middle of the canvas that has big pink lips—while the white faces have slim noses and daintier mouths. All the faces look in different directions. Some stare directly out from the canvas while others gaze left or right. All emerge from the underlying foment of violent color, suggestive of war. A dual context of race relations and the Vietnam-American War exists within *King's Wish*, which parallels the subtext of King's speeches in 1967 and 1968.

When Whitten created *King's Wish* in 1968, Dr. King's primary concerns had shifted away from the utopia described at the March on Washington. In the wake of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, efforts to integrate communities all across the country were faltering: individuals claiming Euroethnic descent fled racially mixed urban areas for more homogeneous suburban regions. Dr. King and his colleagues directed their focus to

a new initiative, the Poor People's Campaign in 1967, which they viewed as the Civil Rights Movement's logical next step.[13] The initiative focused on combating systemic economic inequality, as Dr. King and his colleagues believed that achieving economic security was the key to full citizenship for Black Americans and other economically disadvantaged groups.[14]

The black and white faces that populate King's dream and are scattered throughout the composition, in part represent King's views on race relations during his final years. Juxtaposed against one another, these faces may reflect the two distinct Americas that King discussed in his speech, "The Other America," delivered on April 14, 1967 at Stanford University. Dr. King addressed how citizens could experience two drastically different realities of life in the same country, based on their access to opportunity and economic resources. He states:

> In [One] America, millions of people experience every day the opportunity of having life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness in all of their dimensions. And in this America millions of young people grow up in the sunlight of opportunity. But tragically and unfortunately, there is another America. This other America has a daily ugliness about it that constantly transforms the ebulliency of hope into the fatigue of despair … In this America millions of people find themselves living in rat-infested, vermin-filled slums. In this America people are poor by the millions.[15]

For King, America was split in two along racial lines where white America represented the land of opportunity, while the other America—in which African Americans comprise the largest group of non-white peoples—represented the land of "blasted hopes and shattered dreams."[16] From his perspective the two Americas orbited one another—like the black and white faces in *King's Wish*—but were cast apart due to the racism. In *King's Wish,* the black and white faces revolve around one another but never directly

make contact, suggesting the racial divide and impasse toward racial equity where King and his supporters found themselves in 1967. Many former white allies, especially in the North, severed ties and changed ideological direction once the movement grew out of the South—spreading across the country in urban metropolises like New York City, Chicago, and Detroit—and increasingly articulating demands for genuine racial equality, in the form of access to decent housing, fair pay, and quality education. Frustrated by white Americans' resistance and seeming unwillingness to confront and work through the long-standing issue of race in America, Black and white Americans at this time seemed locked in an impasse.

King's opposition to the Vietnam-American War was part of his fight against economic inequity: calling the war "an enemy of the poor," in his April 4, 1967 speech "Beyond Vietnam," at Riverside Church in New York City,[17] he publicly expressed his moral issues with American violence in Vietnam,[18] which he and many others viewed as "a contradiction of American ideals of self-determination, justice, and decency."[19] As King emphasized, the war took a double toll on the poor, especially poor young black men, who were not only being deprived by the U.S. government at home, but whose lives were being jeopardized in vast numbers abroad. As long as resources were being drained into Vietnam, King opined, no progress could be made for bettering the lives of Americans.

Whitten's vigorous brushstrokes and hot palette in *King's Wish* may have been designed to capture something of King's intense anger about the American-Vietnam War. "[The] hot palette came out because of the environment that it took place in precisely at

that time in history. It had to be hot," notes Whitten.[20] In "The Casualties of the War in Vietnam," delivered on February 25, 1967 in Los Angeles, King describes the conditions overseas:

> We see the rice fields of a small Asian country being trampled at will and burned at whim: we see grief-stricken mothers with crying babies clutched in their arms as they watch their little huts burst forth into flames; we see the fields and valleys of battle being painted with humankind's blood; we see the broken bodies left prostrate in countless fields; we see young men being sent home half-men--physically handicapped and mentally deranged.[21]

Here King describes the catastrophic effects of U.S. search-and-destroy operations in which American soldiers razed Vietnamese villages. Shooting fire and napalm bombs, soldiers were instructed to burn everything in sight; they set homes and the surrounding areas ablaze, killed livestock, and destroyed food sources. The ferocity of Whitten's marks convey war's violence and trauma, just as King's speech does. Whitten's marks fly in different directions, burst with frenetic energy, and suggest war's chaos and disorientation. Many of the marks recall bomb blasts such as the cerulean blue funnel in the upper left corner, and just below it, a similar tornado-like form in teal brushstrokes. Surrounded by a fiery orange atmosphere and foggy black bushels of smoke, the painting seems to explode upward beyond the painting's top edge.

An autobiographical painting about Whitten's identity

When I met King in '57 it made a great impression on me as a young person.[22]

Yet just as the painting suggests itself as an expression of King's wishes and dreams, it equally seems that Whitten was simultaneously exploring his own self. He refers to this series as his autobiographical paintings: "[The] subject matter was Jack

Whitten, hence I call [them] autobiographical," he explained in a 2009 oral history, before further defining that autobiographical content according to the terms of identity: "I'm dealing with myself in terms of the political, myself in terms of sexuality, myself in terms of testing my spiritual views."[23]

Dr. King played a significant role in Whitten's autobiographical thinking. As the son of a civil rights advocate, Whitten's commitment to Dr. King's ideas dates back to his childhood in Bessemer, Alabama.[24] "My eyes had already been opened to the Civil Rights Movement but to have the opportunity to personally meet someone with that kind of power was so meaningful," recollects Whitten of his first meeting with King as a college freshman in 1957.[25] In Montgomery, Alabama with the Tuskegee Institute marching band during the bus boycotts, Whitten raced to the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church to hear Dr. King speak in person of "racial equality, the dignity of Black people, [and] faith in the scriptures which provided the spiritual strength to overcome the legacy of slavery."[26] Whitten recounts, "[King's message] made an impact on me. It gave me something to live for."[27] He continues, "As a young man, I was so inspired by him and wholeheartedly believed in 'We Shall Overcome.'"[28] Here Whitten indicates his early belief in the message of this civil rights anthem, which embodies Dr. King's message that one day people of all races will be able to walk hand in hand and live in peace amongst one another.

Deeply moved by Dr. King, Whitten became a student civil rights activist in 1959 at Southern University, when he transferred there to study art – yet he soon found himself unable to live with the vitriol such protests attracted from whites. In the spring of

1960, Whitten and other student activists led a civil rights march to the state capitol building in downtown Baton Rouge, in protest of the limited funding black schools received from the state.[29] What started as a student-led peaceful nonviolent march grew into a large-scale and nationally televised demonstration that ultimately turned violent. "I witnessed evil," Whitten later recalled. "I saw hatred coming out of white people. They attacked us, threw shit and piss on us. We made it all the way to the state capital building as they were hitting us with sticks. I did it then, but I made a vow, I would never put myself in that position again."[30] In a 2007 interview with Robert Storr, Whitten describes how this formative experience made him reconsider his participation on the civil rights movement's front lines: "I just couldn't go on. I believed in Dr. King's philosophies; but in reality I found out that I didn't have it in me to continue in this direction. I found it too difficult to turn the other cheek."[31]

The march represented a turning point for the artist: "There's something about spilled blood that will change you forever … I knew I had to leave the South because I would be killed or I would end up killing somebody."[32] Whitten decided it was time to leave the South and what he described as "American Apartheid" permanently behind. He threw his possessions into the university's lake and boarded a Greyhound bus headed North to begin his next chapter studying art at Cooper Union in New York City.[33]

Hence, while Whitten maintained his interest in King, Jr. and his teachings—once remarking that Dr. King "remain[ed] one of the most inspirational figures I've ever met"—this interest overlapped with a series of significant transitions in the young artist's life.[34] *King's Wish* reflects a difficult period for the artist in which he was dealing with

internal struggles, such as leaving the South and figuring out his identity as a man and an artist, and was confronted by an external environment no less intense as a result of the continued fight for civil rights and the unpopular war in Vietnam. Describing how this type of emotionally intense environment influenced *King's Wish*, the artist states:

> [It has] a hot palette … It hits that hot temperature of reds, oranges, yellows … There's an emotional appeal there that's different from other ranges of color … Things were heating up in America. By that time we had experienced what, four assassinations. The height of the Vietnam War. We were seeing horrible, horrible, horrible images. We had seen things from World War II but it was something about seeing that on TV right there happening made it different. It hit home. All of us were experiencing all kinds of pressures … All I'm saying is going back to sensibility and plasticity, events and things around you, the environment where you are, shapes what you are doing.[35]

Made in 1968 after he moved from the south to New York City, *King's Wish* reflects a turbulent period in Whitten's life—a time in which he struggled to understand his identity not only as a Black American but as a southerner in the North and as an artist—he had to reconcile old ideas of identity from the South with his experience in the North. In a 2009 oral history interview, Whitten described how his identity had been prescribed for him growing up in the segregated south, where race defined identity: "[I was] black, period, whether [I] liked it or not."[36] Arriving in New York, Whitten sensed that his earlier perception of himself needed to change.[37] As a result, "the content of my painting from the sixties dealt with my search for identity,"[38] explained the artist. "I had to get things under control. I had to remake myself in my own image. And that's what prompted the identity paintings. And that's what the 1960s were about. I unraveled myself in the '60s."[39] The highly-charged colors and aggressive figuration of *King's Wish* reflect the personal and political turmoil of 1968 for Whitten who was grappling with

"the everyman question of 'Who Am I?'"[40] According to the artist, paintings made during this decade, including *King's Wish,* were created out of emotional necessity:[41] "they show my wrestling with the problem of self-identity."[42]

"I'm putting Jack Whitten on the couch is what I'm doing," explains the artist in 2009, recalling his works from the 1960s.[43] Whitten's expression of inner turmoil thus drives *King's Wish* – perhaps as much as Whitten's dedication to King's thought does (a point I will return to). Guided by the abstract expressionists and Jungian psychology, it seems that Whitten tapped into, unleashed, and transfigured his feelings into painterly gesture on canvas.[44]

Jung and the unconscious

Like many of his contemporaries in the 1960s,[45] Whitten began reading Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Carl Gustav Jung in order to explore himself: "I was reading Carl Jung's theories—everything I could get my hands on."[46] One such text was Jung's 1958 *Psyche and Symbol*, a collection of writings compiled by Jung's former student Violet S. de Laszlo that elucidates Jung's ideas regarding the conscious and the unconscious minds. Jung developed Freud's concept of the unconscious by suggesting that it be understood as two-parted, that there is a personal unconscious and a collective one. Jung viewed the personal unconscious in accordance with Freudian theory: as a repository of information once known to an individual's conscious mind but which has been repressed or otherwise forgotten. The collective unconscious, Jung proposed, was the psyche's deepest level, a reservoir of inherited information passed on throughout the

ages, and intrinsic among every being within a species. Jung proposed that a series of archetypes—primordial images with universal meanings—exist in the collective unconscious and manifest themselves as recurrent symbolic motifs in culture, religion, dreams, and visions. For Jung, the collective unconscious exerted a considerable influence over the personal unconscious and conscious mind. By interpreting dreams and waking fantasies—the unconscious mind's spontaneous manifestations—through analysis, Jung proposed that we can uncover symbols tracing back to the collective unconscious. In short, knowing the unconscious was to know the self and one's society.[47]

Whitten was far from alone, as far as his interest in Jung goes, and it is likely that he engaged with Jung's writings as a result of his exposure to a group of abstract painters now known as the Abstract Expressionists or New York School. Whitten became friendly with a number of these painters, with whom he often chatted about art, life, and other matters at the Cedar Tavern (a popular watering hole frequented by Willem de Kooning, Franz Kline, and others at the time).[48] In the 1950s and 1960s, Jung's concept of the unconscious was particularly attractive to this group, whose members believed that art should be sourced from the unconscious.[49] Drawing upon Jung's theory of the collective unconscious, many artists looked to mythic motifs drawn from ancient or so-called primitive cultures in an effort to tap into an ancestral primordial spirit. Attempting to engage with and express a universal inner source, this group of artists also aimed to capture the nature of their psyches through spontaneous gestures, improvisational mark making, and other such automatic techniques designed to remove conscious control of the painter's hand.

In *King's Wish*, Whitten draws from the Abstract Expressionist concept of the instinctive gesture as the psyche's conduit: "They are intense emotional images arrived at through self-psychoanalytical procedures, using techniques taken from Surrealism and Abstract Expressionism," he explained in a 1983 letter to Henry Geldzahler.[50] Stylistically, his richly gestural portrayal of King, Jr. resembles Willem de Kooning's famous *Woman* series, in which human-like figures emerge from polychrome backgrounds built with sweeping, seemingly improvisational gestures atop layers of colored washes [fig. 4]. The stylistic adaptation may well derive from Whitten's particular admiration for de Kooning at the time.[51]

Exploring race and identity through Jung

Yet in this wrestling with "the problem of self-identity," as he put it, Whitten races his represented archetypes in ways that de Kooning never thought to. Reflecting on analytical psychology's importance to his work, Whitten quickly turns from its popularity among his artistic circle to its questions about the subconscious and its effects on racial identity.

> That was a time when all of us [were] involved with the early writings of Jung, been introduced to Freud and everybody is toying with the notion of the subconscious and the effects upon the notions of identity and coming from the South, being black, and the politics of race, terminologies of who am I.[52]

When Whitten refers to "everybody," he is likely thinking of the New York School, but it seems unlikely that de Kooning and the others were thinking much about being Black or much about race at all. That Whitten shifts near seamlessly from "everybody" to his

personal thoughts at the time, is telling – particularly in terms of understanding *King's Wish,* where its two layers function similarly to Jung's descriptions of the relationship between symbol and the collective unconscious.

In *King's Wish*, the colorful abstract layer represents the landscape of the collective unconscious. Just as the collective unconscious plays a profound role in an individual's personal unconscious and waking state, the amorphous layer of color underpins the whole composition and acts as its foundation. Jung explains, "[The] personal unconscious rests upon a deeper layer, which does not derive from personal experience and is not a personal acquisition but is inborn. This deeper layer I call the collective unconscious."[53] This layer of the painting, like the collective unconscious, serves as a repository for the black-and-white-raced faces, which allude to Jung's concept of archetypes, or primordial images, which comprise the contents of the collective unconscious.

The disembodied faces, rendered only in floating lines, recall masks; sketchily outlined, they float atop the underlayer's washes. Given the way that Whitten used frequently stereotyped facial attributes to distinguish between the Black and white races, it seems that Whitten was engaging with race as symbolic. This may represent a response to Jung's concept of the persona, filtered through Whitten's thoughts on race and identity. Jung proposed that the persona—derived from the Latin word *persona,* which refers to an actor's mask—is the individual's public self or role. Concealing a person's true nature, the persona differs from the authentic self.[54] "One could say, with a little exaggeration, that the persona is that which in reality one is not, but which oneself as well as others

think one is," Jung wrote.[55] In this sense race can operate as a persona. The color of one's skin might be seen as a mask, simultaneously projecting an image of a person based on racial stereotypes and assumptions, while also concealing a true self. Race as a persona clouds the truth that under race's masks, we are more connected than not - just as in *King's Wish* the abstract layer underpins all the faces, regardless of their symbolic race.

In "The Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious," Jung states, "But one must learn to know oneself in order to know who one is."[56] Whitten took this message to heart in *King's Wish*. The painting's content and style suggest that Whitten was attempting to get to know himself through engaging the multiple levels of his unconscious—personal and collective—and drawing on Jungian theory to do so. "The archetype is essentially an unconscious content that is altered by becoming conscious and by being perceived, and it takes its color from the individual consciousness in which it happens to appear," Jung states.[57] By unpacking these primordial images and their meaning, Whitten in turn was able to understand his psyche through his painting process.

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Through constructing an array of complex visual relationships between the floating face-outlines of *King's Wish* and its abstract first layer, it seems that Whitten distinguishes between race and identity. This would parallel his experiences in moving from the South—where race and identity were often conflated—to the North, where Whitten began wrestling with his own feelings about identity. While race might be a Jungian persona, or operate similarly in that it is an immediate projection, identity may contain far more. It seems that Whitten may be imparting a new conception of identity

onto these faces, one that he began to formulate in New York, in which identity encompassed more than the color of his skin or his racial ancestry. Reflecting almost fifty years later on the period in which he was actively grappling with these issues, the artist states:

> My experiences in the 1960s taught me that it is simplistic and misleading to think of identity only in terms of race. The American political system introduced the notion of identity as a racial issue as a means to maintain the status quo, i.e., to politicize "the Other." There is no such thing as "the Other!" "The Other" was constructed by White people's imaginary fantasies about Black people to camouflage their own psychic inadequacies. Ultimately, identity is a universal concept that is expected of everyone. It is not solely about the color of one's skin. In its absolute "purest form," it is the structuring of personal aesthetics.[58]

During the 1960s, it seems that Whitten discovered he was no longer relegated to being "Black," in the narrow Southern sense of his childhood. In New York, he could cultivate his own conception of identity and could be not only a Black man, but a Black American, and a Black American artist.

Yet while Whitten categorizes *King's Wish* as an autobiographical work, he also claims Dr. King as its subject, suggesting an overlap between his and King's consciousnesses, in which internal and external struggles about racial and national identities commingle. If *King's Wish* addresses both Dr. King's and Whitten's states of mind, it appears that Jung's concept of the collective unconscious also underpins this double psychic portrait.

Chapter 2: Jack Whitten and Malcolm X, Becoming a Global Citizen

In 1970, I made a deliberate and conscious decision to start experimenting with the possibilities of paint without imposing the added burden of psychological implications.[59]

Whitten's only triangular-shaped canvas, *Homage to Malcolm*, 1970, commemorates the life and legacy of Malcolm X (b. 1925, d. 1965), a leader in the Black freedom movement. Created five years after Malcolm X's assassination, the painting was one of two memorial works Whitten dedicated to the American human rights activist, Muslim minister, and Black Power leader.[60] Whitten created *Homage to Malcolm* in a style that he calls "symbolic abstraction," where a symbol stands in for something—in this case, a triangle for a person—and additionally connotes a second visual meaning. In a video titled "The Political is in the Work," Whitten explains *Homage to Malcolm,* including the significance of its triangular shape: "Malcolm had a grasp of the universal aspect of the struggle that he was involved with …," Whitten states, "It's that conversion to the universal that gave him more power. The most fitting way, symbolic, was to go back to the classical symbol of the triangle, to offer that sense of strength."[61]

This ability to represent the universal that Whitten identifies with Malcolm X also characterizes the shifts in stylistic approach that Whitten began making at the turn of the 1970s. Moving beyond the specifically American framework of his series of paintings dedicated to Martin Luther King, Jr., Whitten's subsequent paintings—beginning with *Homage to Malcolm*—address his expanding and more universal conception of identity. Despite their shared content (insofar as both are homages to prominent Black civil rights leaders and were created during the same time period, just two years apart) *Homage to*

Malcolm is startlingly different from *King's Wish*. Whitten's interest in using a more universal style to represent Malcolm X can be traced to a few shifts that occurred for the artist around the time he made *Homage to Malcolm*: he visited Crete for the first time, which led him to begin making sculptures inspired by African models. This activity reflects larger changes in the social justice movements and the shift from civil rights to Black Power and its Pan-Africanist ethos.[62] As I argue, these personal and political changes inspire the formal and material shifts in Whitten's practice that make *Homage to Malcolm* so different from *King's Wish*. By 1970, Whitten is expressing a Black consciousness that is not only American or Black American but reflects his becoming a citizen of the world.

In this chapter I examine the work's Pan-Africanism. I first look at how African sculpture shaped Whitten's painting practice in 1970 when he created *Homage to Malcolm*. Then I consider this Pan-Africanism in relation to the philosophies and cosmologies of the Black Arts Movement and Sun Ra.

From the personal to the universal

Carving wood has been the single most [important] influence on my paintings.[63]

Whitten's austere mark-making in *Homage to Malcolm*, 1970, markedly contrasts with his more expressive and emotionally charged brushwork in *King's Wish.* The cloudy blacks of the innermost triangles in *Homage to Malcolm* are the result of Whitten applying a mixture of black paint and solvent and then rubbing the area of canvas with a cloth or rag to achieve the foggy appearance. The painting's surface is an index for the

tool that created it, an afro comb. Overlapping in multiple directions, the sections of lines cross one another, forming a looping hatch-mark pattern. The 1968 *King's Wish* exhibits a kind of relational painting, which in Whitten's words, "mean[s] that the artist put down a brushstroke, a second brushstroke answered by the first one, a third one, a fourth one and so on, step after step."[64] In *Homage to Malcolm*, Whitten alleviates such related marks and instead employs a non-relational painting technique that distanced the artist's hand, and by proxy, his emotions. Whereas the aggressive mark-making in *King's Wish* is personal—it embodies Whitten's (and King's) turmoil and the chaos and confusion of the time—*Homage to Malcolm*'s raked and blotted surface, by comparison, is more universal. The marks do not embody a particular feeling or idea, nor correlate to any one psyche. The differences in mark-making between *King's Wish* and *Homage to Malcolm* highlight Whitten's transition from relational to non-relational painting and suggest his departure from the personal to the universal.

This marked shift in style emerged from two related impulses: one, an attempt to liberate himself from the influence of the New York School, particularly Willem de Kooning;[65] the other, a revived interest in sculpting inspired by African models, as a way of "getting back to his roots," as he put it.[66] "1970 was a big turning point for me," Whitten recalls, "Big time. I realized that I loved Bill de Kooning too much."[67] This was just a year after 1969, another year of important artistic shifts that Whitten often identifies in interviews: "1969 started a real adventure that's ongoing today…,"[68] the artist remarked in a 2009 interview for the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art, discussing the first of what would be many trips to the Greek island of Crete. Whitten

notes, “During the late 1960s and early 1970s, everyone began looking for their roots. This was when Afrocentrism was blossoming; I was just getting started as a painter with an interest in our intergalactic roots.”[69] While Whitten had previously encountered African sculpture at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Brooklyn Museum of Art in New York,[70] in Crete he developed a life-long sculpture practice that he resumed each summer, where he carved wooden objects after African sculpture.[71]

Whitten’s studio metamorphosed as he pursued these interrelated impulses; the one, an escape from de Kooning’s influence, the other, an embrace of sculpture.[72] “I realized that I had to do something drastically radical from the relative gesture of my wrist, which was becoming too habitual.”[73] In her 2018 essay “Continental Drift,” Kelly Baum attributes Whitten’s stylistic shift to his growing sculptural practice. “Surely these two events can be correlated: just as the shift in his painting drove him to experiment more widely with sculpture, his new commitment to sculpture encouraged him to adapt new processes in his paintings.”[74] At the turn of the 1970s, Whitten switched from oil to acrylic and began experimenting with pouring layers of paint—which he referred to as “slabs”—onto his canvas. Covering the whole picture plane, Whitten built the slab to reach a thickness of up to almost a half-inch. To counteract his gestural impulses, he replaced his paintbrushes with new mark-making tools such as an afro comb—a sign of African American identity—and later a saw blade—a reference to his profession as a carpenter—and a squeegee-like instrument, a creation of his own making he called ‘the developer.’[75] In *Homage to Malcolm*, he uses his afro comb to carve the slab of paint and reveal the light and layers of color from under the painting’s surface.[76]

These new tools and materials not only critique the painterly gesture but are markedly sculptural - a reflection of Whitten's intense interest in African sculpture within the same year (1970). In his new process, which emphasized construction over painting, Whitten began to consider his paintings more as objects, and the action in which they were made as "making" rather than "painting." Describing how his sculpture practice influenced his altered approach to painting, the artist notes, "By 1970 I'm starting to make a painting ...The paintings are being made. They're being constructed, same processes I'm using in wood carving, you know, laminating, carving, sanding, gluing. That's what's happening in the paint."[77] Speaking to the transference of knowledge from one medium to another and how his work in sculpture influences and carries over into his painting, Whitten states in a 2009 interview: "In sculpture I carve light. I chisel light. I grind light. I sand light. I laminate light. Well, by god, man—that is what I'm doing in painting! Through sculpture I have refactored my whole way and approach to painting."[78]

Thus, this avoidance of self-figuration in gesture—through embracing the sculptural—reflects a new way of thinking, one which prioritizes the universal over the personal, but which is also grounded in Africa. As it happens, Whitten's exploration of Malcolm X as an artistic subject reflects the newly-close relationship between painting and sculpture in his work, and its conceptual links to a more universal style.

Homage to Malcolm, 1965 as personal, *Homage to Malcolm*, 1970 as universal

The 1970 painting was not Whitten's first *Homage to Malcolm.* A 1965 sculpture carries that same name, made the summer following Malcolm X's assassination [fig. 5]. Employing various carpentry tools such as chisels and hammers, Whitten directly carved into a single block of elm wood, reductively chipping away and shaping the original block. Staining most of the wood a dark chestnut, Whitten attached varied metal pieces to each end, so that the sculpture consists of four segments: a nail-encrusted head—suggesting African hair—wooden torso, a collection of metal coils, and a smooth arabesque of a tail (or horn). Horizontally displayed, *Homage to Malcolm* suggests a recumbent body - particularly so given its four segments. It seems likely that Whitten was responding to Malcolm X's death by abstractly representing his slain body. Yet the raw elm wood torso also looks like a handle, as if the viewer might pick up Whitten's sculpture and brandish it, perhaps as a weapon, ritual item, or storytelling object. It seems to await use for purposes other than viewing alone.

The differences between Whitten's sculpted and painted homages to Malcolm X reveal much about his interest in finding more universal modes of expression, particularly in terms of their symbolism. Looming over its viewers, the painting measures near eight feet high and ten feet wide. Somewhat like the pyramids at Giza, the painting has monumental scale, while the sculpture appears in human scale, as if the viewer might pick it up at any time. Though both are abstract, the sculpture is far more figurative than the painting, which relies on geometrical forms and mark-making divorced from the hand and does not suggest human forms. Accordingly, the 1965 sculpture seems more totem than memorial, while the 1970 painting seems more memorial than totem.

A multi-part sculpture carved from wood, *Homage to Malcolm*, 1965 materially resembles and shares conceptual ties with totem poles. As symbolic objects, totems often represent an individual, family, or clan; they both mark and tell the story of that person or group.[79] *Homage to Malcolm* likewise references and contains the story of X. Its four-part structure suggests this conceptual link, as the parts can both suggest portions of the human body or sections in a story. Tellingly, when Roberta Smith reviewed *Odyssey: Jack Whitten, Sculpture, 1963-2017* (2018), at the Met Breuer, she describes *Homage to Malcolm* along similar lines, calling it, "something like a horizontal totem," and interprets the four-part structure as tracing the different chapters of X's life. Smith writes, "These four sections can be read as the stages of Malcolm X's life, as petty criminal, prison inmate and Muslim convert, rising Nation of Islam star and finally as visionary leader, ruthlessly cut down."[80]

While the 1965 sculpture seems rooted in Malcolm X's life and physical passing, by the 1970 painting, it appears that Whitten is instead thinking of the life and death of Malcolm X more broadly, focusing more on Malcolm X as a universal figure rather than an individual. In the painted tribute to Malcolm X, geometric abstraction—specifically the universal symbol of the triangle—replaces the body. Accordingly, while Whitten's 1965 sculpture appears totemic, *Homage to Malcolm*, 1970, instead seems more demonstrative of a memorial: an object that preserves the memory of a person.[81]

Universal black consciousness in *Homage to Malcolm* and the Black Arts Movement

While Whitten chose a flat triangle for *Homage to Malcolm*'s form for its universal appeal and denotation of strength—as he described in "The Political is in the Work"—the painting still recalls ancient Egyptian and Nubian pyramids. Its four equilateral triangles, echo those of pyramids' four walls, even if the four painted triangles fit inside the canvas, nested into one another. Egyptian pyramids are quintessential memorials, built to pay tribute to the pharaohs and house their remains.

If the pyramids inspired Whitten's 1970 memorial to Malcolm X, the reference paralleled Black Power and Black Arts Movement philosophies of the time, which likewise memorialized Malcolm X. Indeed, Whitten painted *Homage to Malcolm* during the height of the Black Power Movement in the United States.[82] Like the Civil Rights movement, Black Power was a political and social movement whose advocates sought radical social and political change in terms of racial equality and fought to secure the innate human and civil rights that African Americans were denied by their own government. The goals of Black Power included developing black consciousness, solidarity, self-determination and community control.[83] Advocates of Black Power believed in fostering racial and cultural pride through intellectual investment in African history and the rejection of European hegemony, a world view now known as Afrocentrism. Molefi Kete Asante defines Afrocentrism as: "a paradigm that suggests all discourse about African people should be grounded in the centrality of Africans in their own narratives."[84] In other words, Afrocentrism holds that people of African descent are entitled to tell their history from their own perspective. Afrocentrists likewise reject

Eurocentric culture and history, seeing it as ill-suited to people long-subjugated by Western civilization and thinking.

The Black Arts Movement (BAM)—often referred to as the cultural arm of Black Power—also rejected Eurocentric worldviews to emphasize the black experience in art.[85] The BAM "called for a revolutionary black art that was an extension of the "black liberation struggle," notes artist Dawoud Bey in his 2006 essay "The Black Artist as Invisible (Wo)Man."[86] James Smethurst, author of *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s,* describes the importance of Afrocentrism to the BAM: "an emphasis on the need to develop, or expand upon, a distinctly African American or African culture that stood in opposition to white culture or cultures."[87]

Thus, Ancient Egypt held a special position for members of the Black Arts Movement and other Afrocentrists. Because the BAM encouraged the development of an independent Black culture, fostered by racial and cultural pride in Africa, pyramids and other African motifs—the use of which date back to the Harlem Renaissance—appeared often in artwork during this time.[88] Previously included within the trajectory of western (white) art and architectural histories, artists such as Imamu Amiri Baraka, employed Egypt's pyramids as an achievement of ancient African civilization.[89] According to John F. Szwed, Egypt has "served as a symbol for antiquity, cultural origin, beauty, esotericism, eternal life, power, the idea of the nation state, and social order."[90] Reclaiming the pyramids tied people of African descent to a grand historical past, a history where slavery was not the predominant narrative.[91]

Beyond his Afrocentric choice of symbolic abstraction, Whitten embeds Africa within his expression of the universal in *Homage to Malcolm* - as his sculptural use of paint emerged from his interest in African sculpture. A statement the artist made in 1978 provides insight into how he may have been thinking about the painting from a sculptural perspective. He states:

> When I speak of a geometrical figure I am speaking of a reduction of African wood carving. My idea of a triangle is that figure which is ~~arrived~~ deducted from an African carving, the reduction of a square, or a rectangle, trapezoid, etc. These geometrical figures are the matter of African carving. Cubism as we know it was a borrowing of that matter.[92]

Whitten's interest in space, light and time—which he made known in interviews and also in his recently published studio logs—in addition to his interest in carving wood, and the relationship he perceived between African sculptures, cubism, and modernism, might explain this.[93] In fact, Whitten's transformations of the three-dimensional object relates to a revelation he had around this time when studying how African sculpture operates: "In the 70s when I was carving wood in Greece, I became more aware of the three-dimensional grid operating in African wood carvings," recalls Whitten in a 1990 interview with curator Beryl Wright.[94] Wright, in turn, observes that Whitten's paintings from this period, "began to become more abstract from [his] understanding of this point system and [his] realization of a three-dimensional grid in African wood carving," and additionally, "that the grid developed from that into a different conception and a conscious understanding of spatial relationships in [Whitten's] paintings."[95]

While ideas from the Black Arts Movement suffuse *Homage to Malcolm*, Whitten was not directly affiliated with the movement, though he counted several BAM artists

and poets among his associates (such as Imamu Amiri Baraka).[96] Ian Bourland sums up Whitten's relationship to the BAM by saying, "During this period, Whitten's relationship to the project of black liberation was indirect, but meaningful."[97] Like his fellow artist and friend Frank Bowling—who included him in the exhibition *5+1* that he curated at the State University of New York at Stony Brook in 1969—Whitten believed that 'Black art'[98] could be anything that a black artist wanted it to be.[99] Later histories have associated the BAM with figuration and narrative scenes, as Margo Natalie Crawford discusses in *Black Post-Blackness: The Black Arts Movement and Twenty-first Century Aesthetics* (2017),[100] however Whitten[101] and his like-minded colleagues such as Al Loving, Howardena Pindell, and Joe Overstreet, "were committed to equality, but they were equally committed to their right to aesthetic experimentation," as curator Kellie Jones puts it.[102]

Whitten has long-asserted that his choice of abstraction is political.[103] In a 1987 studio log entry he remarked, "My intention is political in nature. My art is not art for art's sake."[104] Like other Black artists working in abstraction at the time of the BAM, Whitten found ways to communicate notions of Black identity beyond titling his work after important political figures. For him, it was through the process of compression. In a January 2018 interview, he states, "For me the Black experience is compressed into paint as matter. I do not depend on narrative."[105] Whitten explains how he expresses his conception of the Black experience:

> I use the notion of compression. When people ask me about the notion of being a black artist, and what am I doing in terms of the social politics of my age, I tell them: *it's all compressed in there.*

> That is why I don't have to deal with simple narrations. Ok, storytelling is good, but you don't *have* to deal with that shit—just compress it in there.[106]

Whitten synthesizes the political and compresses[107] this information into matter through his process, which he embeds into his paintings. Believing that "narrative must be compressed into matter, there is no need to say it,"[108] In a September 2009 studio log entry Whitten describes this process:

> My identity is compressed into paint as matter. Paint as matter serves as a trap...i.e., information is caught + coded in the material. For me, the painting is not an illustration of an idea. Idea is compressed (conceptuality + perceptuality) within action. e.g., action being the process of making which is plasticity.[109]

In *Homage to Malcolm* it is as if Whitten thought about a pyramid—a three-dimensional object—and compressed it into two dimensions.[110] In this case, the four triangles that comprise the painting represent a pyramid's four sides. Nested one into the other the triangles suggest a recession in space, as if the innermost triangle was also the furthest away. They either grow in scale, or, from the outermost triangle, recede in size. Likewise, the painting's triangular-shaped canvas impresses a sculptural presence and a sense of depth, where the four triangles may suggest a likeness to four angles or perspectives created from carving a block of wood into a unique object. "The space inherent in [painting]," notes Whitten, "the shapes occupy[ing] definite spatial zones Foreground, middle ground + background… layering offers the possibility of distinct spatial zones without depending upon the type of space found in naturalism, it is the surface that is all important."[111]

Yet Whitten's choices in color, texture, and value suggest still other dimensions.[112] By raking the surface of the painting with his afro comb, Whitten carves

into the painted surface, reducing the amount of paint and revealing the light-filled underlayer, which creates space between the triangles as undertones of midnight blue, lime, and red peek through layers of hazy black to set apart the triangles, especially the large middle triangle, the central part of the composition. Whitten's process of manipulating paint, adapted from his reductive wood carving technique, enables him to suggest the many dimensions of an object. Reflecting on his process of using his afro comb as a tool to carve paint, Whitten recalls what he experienced at the time from using this new technique:

> When I did the Afro comb paintings, I found that by cutting through wet paint I could reveal what was underneath, and by revealing what was underneath, I extended the meaning of light in the painting. I didn't have to rely totally upon what I'd mixed into the surface, but what was underneath it. If I scratched through and opened it up, it allowed the light from underneath to come through … I found that when I was systematic about revealing what was underneath, the painting became more optical.[113]

Homage to Malcolm's space neither seems to be here (in the present), nor there (in the past), but instead, beyond (a place in the future). While the painting appears to be both two-dimensional and three-dimensional, it extends to the fourth dimension: time. Whitten explains this dimensionality, which seems evident in *Homage to Malcolm*:

> MULTI-DIMENSIONAL SPACE—[is] an extension of the everyday use of practical one, two + three dimensions to include time as [a] fourth dimension which opens the door to non casual multiple dimensions. Multi-dimensional space is constructed by compressing multiple dimensions into a place of light.[114]

Whitten's interests in physics and the cosmos—paint as matter, surface as multi-dimensional—remain centered in Africa even as they "time travel" across centuries from Egypt to Malcolm X. Like Whitten, Sun Ra (1914-1993)—the experimental jazz musician and composer, and a pioneer of what would later be referred to as

Afrofuturism,[115] —incorporated Egyptian elements into his vision of a present and future.[116] Having met Sun Ra in the jazz clubs of 1960s New York, Whitten was a fan and a follower of the artist. In his 2012 essay, "Five Lines Four Spaces," Whitten refers to Sun Ra as his "cosmic guide,"[117] and also states in a 2015 interview that, "Sun Ra was right on the money, humans came here from outer space as minerals and chemicals,"[118] in a reference to humanity's origins.

Egypt played a key role in the myth Sun Ra created about himself and was a key component of his cosmic philosophy. Sun Ra's biographer John F. Szwed notes how the artist would "introduce himself [to someone] as Sun Ra, and [tell] them that he was a descendant of the ancient Egyptians."[119] As an avid reader and student of various genres, Sun Ra developed a philosophy that encompassed an amalgamation of many different sources including science fiction, the Bible, esoteric beliefs inspired by secret societies like the Freemasons, an imagined space-age future, and especially, Egyptian mysticism.[120] Combining these disparate ideas, which could broadly be described as Afrofuturist as well as Afrocentrist, including Egyptian and other non-western mythologies, mysticism, technology and science fiction,[121] Sun Ra created an idiosyncratic worldview that encompassed the past and future, leaving the present world behind—where he believed that "the Negro had fallen from grace, and that existence in the United States was a discontinuity in a history of a great people,"—for a better reality, one in which envisioned a new version of history where Black people were "restored to their former glory" and "walked as kings and queens."[122]

The dimensionality in Whitten's painting resonates with Sun Ra's Afrofuturist ideas of space and time that bring together elements from the past and present to imagine a new future. Szwed notes, "[Sun Ra] had taken people to what Amiri Baraka called a spiritual past," by engaging in ancient history and mysticism; "[and he then] sought to take them to a spiritual future,"[123] by contemplating an existence beyond the realm of Earth. In a 1975 studio log entry Whitten parallels Sun Ra believing that he "must leave this earth in order to capture this kind of spatial quality" …. [Insisting that] "one must not be earth bound!!"[124]

Homage to Malcolm's pyramidal form suggests links to the Black Arts Movement, and Afrocentrist and Afrofuturist ideas, which were currents circulating at the time. Whitten's use of a pyramidal shape and black palette alludes to these ideas, but the way in which he employs them reflects his own world view and addresses the Black experience, which for him appears to be something universal, which is not restricted to any one place or time.

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Whitten's choice of symbol had historical connotations with respect to his choice of subject: Malcolm X himself visited the pyramids twice in 1964, the year before his death. From reading *The Autobiography of Malcolm X,* Whitten was aware of Malcolm X's sojourns to Africa and the Egyptian pyramids outside of Cairo.[125] Leading up to his African journey, Malcolm X had recently severed ties with the Nation of Islam and was in the process of converting to the Sunni faith of Islam.[126] Malcolm X's trip to Africa, specifically to Egypt, was a result of these recent changes. He not only sought to

experience orthodox Islam from its source—as he made the Hajj to Mecca—but also to experience Africa, his ancestral homeland.[127] As historian Manning Marable describes, "[Malcolm] wanted to use his ... time in Cairo to reexamine his identity and practices as a Muslim and as a person of African descent."[128]

Whitten's choice in symbol reflects Malcolm X's then-newfound particularly universalist conception of Black identity expressed after his second trip to Africa. In his last year, Malcolm X began preaching in more universalizing language: "My religious pilgrimage to Mecca has given me a new insight into the true brotherhood of Islam, which encompasses all of the races of mankind … The common goal of 22 million Afro Americans is respect and HUMAN RIGHTS," wrote Malcolm X in 1964 article for the *Egyptian Gazette*.[129]

Malcolm X's Africa trip marked a radical shift in his rhetoric. Prior to his break with the Nation of Islam, Malcolm X was a vocal proponent of Elijah Muhammad's advocacy of racial separatism and his demonizing of whites.[130] Summarizing Malcolm X's separatist viewpoint in his introduction to *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, journalist M.S. Handler states, "[Malcolm] argued the Muslim case for separation as the only solution in which the Negro could achieve his own identity, develop his own culture, and lay the foundations for a self-respecting productive community."[131] Malcolm X believed that integration was a fraud and that it would be impossible for the United States to achieve an integrated society.[132] At the 1962 conference "Integration or Separation," he reiterated his belief that self-determination was the key to liberation delivering a message that Black men and women must solve their own problems as the white man

could never be relied on to institute change.[133] Malcolm X rarely missed an opportunity to preach that white people were devils. At a Mosque No. 7 meeting in December 1961, he explained: "The devil is not a spirit, rather he has blue eyes, blond hair, and he has a white skin."[134] Because of his separatist views and radical rhetoric, Malcolm X was often at odds with other civil rights leaders.[135] Prior to 1964, it seemed that Malcolm X's views were staunchly cemented, however his experiences in the Middle East that year altered the way he viewed the world, and especially the way in which he thought about race and integration.[136]

Malcolm X's trip to Egypt and other parts of Africa in 1964—like Whitten's in 1969—radically altered his worldview and reoriented his thinking, setting him on a different course the short remainder of his life. As someone often described as anti-white, the following passages from *The Autobiography* suggest a radical change. In a letter home, Malcolm X recalls the generosity he received from a white-complexioned Muslim in Jedda and the moment of revelation that ensued:

> That morning was when I first began to reappraise the "white man." It was when I first began to perceive that "white man," as commonly used, means complexion only secondarily; primarily it described attitudes and actions. In America, "white man" meant specific attitudes and actions toward the black man, and toward all other non-white men. But in the Muslim world, I had seen that men with white complexions were more genuinely brotherly than anyone else had ever been. That morning was the start of a radical alteration in my whole outlook about "white men."[137]

In another part of the letter Malcolm X writes of how this experience forced him to challenge his old ideas and reorient his thinking:

> You may be shocked by these words coming from me. But on this pilgrimage, what I have seen, and experienced, has formed me to *re-arrange* much of my thought-patterns previously held, and to *toss aside* some of my previous conclusions … During the past eleven days here in the Muslim world, I have eaten from the same plate, drunk from the same glass, and slept in the same bed (or on the same rug)—while praying to the same God—with fellow Muslims, whose eyes were the bluest of blue, whose hair was the blondest of blond, and whose skin was the whitest of white.

> And in the words and in the actions and in the deeds of the 'white' Muslims, I felt the same sincerity that I felt among the black African Muslims of Nigeria, Sudan, and Ghana.[138]

As he shifted from the beliefs of the separatist Nation of Islam to accepting the global brotherhood of orthodox Islam and the black diasporic connection to Africa, Malcolm X's international experiences impressed upon him new ideas on race and the possibility of an integrated society.

The pyramids thus symbolize Malcolm X's shift from black nationalism to Black internationalism, as Malcolm X came to express the importance of a diasporic connection to Africa. He believed that, "The man that you call Negro is nothing but an African himself. The unity of Africans abroad and the unity of Africans here in this country can bring about practically any kind of achievement or accomplishment that black people want."[139] Malcolm X was becoming "so much less [black] nationalist and more internationalist," according to Black Power activist Grace Lee Boggs.[140] Synthesizing the significance of Malcolm X's trip to Africa, Marable states: "He experienced for the first time the fullness and profundity of his own African heritage. If the hajj had brought Malcolm to full realization of his Muslim life, the second trip to Africa immersed him in a broad-based Pan-Africanism that cast into relief his role as a black citizen of the world."[141]

According to Marable, Malcolm X's travels helped him to fathom that, "it was possible to be black, a Muslim, *and* an American."[142] Like Malcolm X in 1964, Whitten experienced what it was to travel abroad and engage with different cultures and worldviews. The way in which he viewed the world and also how he saw himself, as a

Black American man, and as a Black American artist, also began to shift as it did for Malcolm X, as a result of traveling. These new experiences shaped his evolving conception of identity - in terms of personal identity but also national identity. Post-Crete, it seems that Whitten, like Malcolm X, began to think of himself less as an American and more as a citizen of the world due to his newfound connection to Africa and its diaspora through his African heritage. Likewise, Malcolm X's experiences with global Islam and ties to Africa through his own heritage influenced and formed his new identity as a Pan-Africanist and a global advocate for Black freedom and human rights. A lasting memorial, *Homage to Malcolm*, is symbolic of the transformations in Malcolm X's life. His less nationalistic conception of black identity emerges following his travels. This also parallels Whitten's shift in identity from Black American to world citizen with an African diasporic connection, as he makes the shift from the personal to the universal through the way in which he begins to conceptualize and construct his paintings by employing new techniques adapted from his sculpture practice. Evident in the style and forms by which he may have viewed and chose to depict Malcolm X, Whitten in 1970, like Malcolm X in 1964, "saw himself as part of a larger world picture."[143]

Chapter 3: *Atopolis,* a city and a cosmos

Whitten began using acrylic paint differently once more in the late 1980s, developing a set of techniques that he continued until his death in 2018. His 2014 acrylic mosaic *Atopolis: For Édouard Glissant* is typical of his approach to acrylic: "What has happened to the slab of paint that I developed in 1970 onwards, what happens now, is I have learned that that slab of paint can be used as a collage," Whitten explained in a 2015 interview with Kellie Jones.[144] In this statement, he connects his discovery of the paint "slab" to the technical jump he made in the late 1980s: paint as collage element.[145]

With the "collage of paint" technique employed in *Atopolis: For Édouard Glissant,* Whitten creates an intentional ambiguity. Hundreds of thousands of tightly-packed and clustered pieces of gleaming silver fragments, or tesserae, as the artist refers to them, comprise the painting, and these silvery pieces and the dense blackness that surrounds them suggest a city captured after dark—lit from myriad residential and commercial buildings occupying urban streets—or the night sky. The scene oscillates between an aerial view of a densely-packed and sprawling metropolis in one moment, and the greater universe from Earth's vantage the next. As an ambiguous image, the work recalls Gestalt visual experiments in which one picture can be perceived alternately as two (or more) distinct images. Concentrated in the center, the painting's silvery clusters are relatively small, though the individual units vary in size and shape: some are rectangular, others more rounded. Placed in close proximity to one another, these tile groupings recall both constellations of stars and galaxies—which tend to appear as

concentrated groupings in the evening sky in Hubble images—and urban density, where buildings and people live in close proximity to each other. Where the linear divisions between panels particularly suggest a gridded city plan, throughout the composition appear forms that suggest spiral galaxies, with their central bulges surrounded by spiraling tendrils of stars. These spiral arms, represented in *Atopolis* by skinny tiles, radiate from each cluster's center and swirl in orbit independently of one another in different directions around clusters dispersed throughout the composition. The silvery tiles populate most of the composition, yet disperse toward the edges, where bits of color, particularly earth tones, including ocean blue, grass green, sand, and amethyst, appear along the painting's periphery. These center and outer clusters seem to be connected by black spaces, suggesting roads or train tracks. Big blotches of dense blackness in the form of irregular-shaped scraps of acrylic—not tesserae as they are not cut into individual units, instead acrylic casts of objects and surfaces—intersperse these tightly packed areas of metallic silver to suggest bodies of water or deep space. Viewed alternately as a rendering of a city from above and/or the depths of space, *Atopolis* is simultaneously grounded in the here and now while also alluding to possible futures.

This chapter explores how *Atopolis* simultaneously commemorates the life and work of Édouard Glissant—a memorial "gift"[146] to the Martiniquean poet, novelist, and philosopher—while also capturing Whitten's own interest in identity through Glissant's philosophical invocation of relation, *créolisation*, relation-identity and *errance* (errantry). Through his conflation of city and cosmos, Whitten expressed his vision of identity through Glissant's ideas. As I suggest, Whitten used light—that which makes the

universe visible to humans—as a metaphor for the expansion of freedom to express his (and Glissant's) pluralistic worldview.

Atopolis and Édouard Glissant

[Glissant] believed in this whole globalness-of pole and ideas coming from different directions.[147]

Two rows of four, square panels form the monumentally-scaled *Atopolis*, which measures 10 feet high by 20 feet wide. Though Whitten covered these seams with tesserae in many areas, many remain evident. The clearest seam is the center crossing, which simultaneously recalls mathematical grids' intersections of *x* and *y* axes and also the four cardinal directions. Moreover, Whitten accentuated this central crossing with dense arrangements of silver tesserae. Other intersections, however, are not as visible: tesserae cover some of the panels' joinings so that it is sometimes difficult to discern where one panel ends and another begins elsewhere in the composition, and this also emphasizes the painting's center axis.

While others have seen *Atopolis*' tesserae groupings as geographically suggestive, as I do, most claim that it lacks that obvious center. Kelly Baum describes the painting as "an aerial view of a landmass. Its small individual units or nodes together form an expansive network, a vast archipelago without a defined center."[148] Curator Yasmil Raymond says that it is, "almost like an aerial view of multiple cities that are overlapping with one another...none of these cities, quote "cities" have a center. They all have multiple centers, they are uniting one another."[149] Both interpretations depend on the works of Glissant (1928-2011) and his ideas about nonhierarchical and relational spaces

that reject center-periphery models of geopolitical relationships.[150] However, both descriptions project Glissant's ideas on to the painting, which does have a clear center. Thus, while Whitten dedicated *Atopolis* to Glissant, and Glissant is central to Whitten's painterly approach, the artist interprets Glissant in a personal way.

Whitten began reading Glissant's works, such as *Poetics of Relation,*[151] in the mid-2010s as a result of curator Dirk Snauwaert's invitation to participate in an exhibition around Glissant's philosophies.[152] Snauwaert commissioned Whitten's painting for the exhibition *Atopolis*, which was informed by Glissant's ideas regarding "fluid identities, unhindered exchanges and an ideal cosmopolitan openness, which he calls the 'Relation,' [which is] interconnected and radically egalitarian."[153]

"Atopolis" is itself a portmanteau: *átopos*, Greek for placelessness and things that are completely original and ineffable; with polis, Greek for city. Snauwaert and co-curator Charlotte Frilling came up with the term based on the works of Glissant,[154] defining it in the exhibition's catalogue as follows:

> The word "atopolis," a neologism openly based on the thought of Édouard Glissant, draws on a history of that type, as it designates an imaginary city made out a great number of elements coming from "everywhere," a POLIS without borders, based on the nomadic destiny of several generations of uprooted migrants..."ATOPOLIS brings to mind what constitutes a city, a POLIS, namely a community composed of individuals whose origins and destinies are diverse."[155]

Whitten built on Snauwaert's definition by focusing on the word's etymology and two-part structure:[156]

> One could really break that word down into 'without a place.' It fits Glissant, it comes out of his... the world *topolis* that he's using is a contradiction- he made it up by piecing it, but the Greek language is very good that way. You can break it down...Atopolis-so it fits Glissant's writing.[157]

Both Snauwaert and Whitten emphasize that disparate parts that have been pieced together to form a new whole comprise atopolis and each touch on the notion of placelessness.

Given that the painting *Atopolis* is a tribute to Glissant, it is no surprise that there are many parallels between Whitten's painting and Glissant's concept of relation, which the philosopher describes as, "the repercussions of cultures, whether in symbiosis or in conflict—in a polka, we might say, or in a laghia."[158] An acrylic mosaic composed of many diverse fragmented yet interconnected parts, *Atopolis* visually manifests Glissant's relation, where many different parts—whether people or cultures—influence one another through various contacts and exchanges. Following relation, these individual pieces come together and transform through creolization,[159] or the mixing of cultures, which Glissant sees as yielding more nuanced versions of identity and/or culture. Each new relation or connection adds new layers of experience that do not dilute but instead enhance the original elements. As Glissant's translator Betsy Wing notes, the process of relation is constantly transforming and establishing new relations as people and cultures migrate, crossing borders—real or imaginary—and intermix, overlap, and collide through creolization.[160] Relation is a fluid space, a site of exchange, where identity and culture constantly shift with each new contact whether a connection or collision. As a result, old binaries such as Black and white, center and periphery, oppressor and oppressed, colonizer and colony are no longer relevant. There is no hierarchical structure in relation.

Tesserae of varying shapes and sizes cover *Atopolis*'s eight panels. These displaced units, derived from various sources, transform into a new whole as they come

together to form the mosaic. Intermixing and cohering, these once separate entities become a vast interconnected network. Still each tesserae's integrity as an original element remains intact. All of the pieces are simultaneously represented as unique original elements but also as components of something larger.

Whitten's painting and Glissant's relation both involve transformation through individual elements derived from various sources, which come together to form something new. Whitten's process, which he described as "construct, deconstruct, reconstruct," parallels the sense of dislocation and relocation that relation expresses. "Three processes are involved," Whitten explains of his acrylic mosaics, "1. Construction – Construction of the acrylic painted skin. 2. Deconstruction – Cutting or breaking of the skin. 3. Reconstruction – the structuring of the picture plane."[161] With *Atopolis*, the first step, "construct," involved making the tesserae. The tesserae result from a process in which Whitten first poured and pressed layers of acrylic between two polyurethane sheets. After freezing the slabs, Whitten began the "deconstruct" phase as he sliced and/or shattered the slabs into individual acrylic units. During "reconstruction," Whitten used the acrylic remnants of numerous slabs to construct *Atopolis.* By combining pieces from different sources, he "reconstructed" the slabs but in a new form using a process that he referred to as laminating, where, piece by piece, he pressed each individual unit onto the surface of the canvas adhering the pieces of tesserae with wet acrylic.[162] Through this process, the acrylic bits intermix and come together, uniting side by side to form the tessellated landscape, which is *Atopolis*.

Yet a marked discrepancy between Glissant's concept and Whitten's interpretation of it: that the painting has a discernible center notably departs from Glissant's notion of relation. Because the process of relation is continuous with things that are constantly changing and evolving, this leaves no space for a center or periphery as both would perpetually transform and shift into and across one another.[163]

I argue that Whitten rooted his interpretation of "atopolis" in himself. His studio notes indicate that he felt very much centered, in that he was ultimately able to carve a place for himself in the world and locate his identity as an artist and member of the African diaspora in relation to Glissant's philosophies. From this sense of a place rooted yet moving, local yet cosmic, Whitten made *Atopolis*.

Whitten looked to Glissant's concept of creolization, the blending of cultures, and his belief in the lack of static roots (or "errantry"), as an articulation of those unfixed aspects of his own reality, due to both his own travel-heavy lifestyle but also to his descending from displaced Africans. "I started in Africa, was brought to the Americas," he wrote in a 2010 studio log entry, "I had to go to Europe … Back to America + Back to Africa … In order to get where I am today…," noted Whitten. "This explains my present identity …. <u>I am global</u>!"[164] Glissant's observation that identities are built in relation,[165] called *relation-identity*—"linked not to a creation of the world but to the conscious and contradictory experience of contact among cultures…[that] is produced in the chaotic network of Relation and not in the hidden violence of filiation—"[166] appears to have attracted Whitten, who himself straddled multiple cultures and migrated between them. It seems that Whitten integrated these various cultural diversities ("thinking beyond narrow

understandings of identity,"[167]) to conceptualize his fluid and continuously evolving sense of self. In another entry from 2012 he writes, "So many black people still think of themselves as Africans. Romantic primitivism is not going to get us any place. Yes, by all means I accept my African roots but I am a new people. We cannot allow memory to imprison us!"[168] By 2014, as suggested by the painting's inclusion of a center, which is in relation and networked to others, along with the myriad fractured components derived from different sources which he draws together to form *Atopolis*, Whitten appears to have imagined himself from a transnational and multicultural perspective, as a citizen of the world, as someone who simultaneously inhabits multiple nonhierarchical identities, as a person and an artist.

Errantry's Impact on Whitten's Life and Work

Who knows where my destination lies? Perhaps I will never know…. but I can always keep traveling![169]

As other chapters in this thesis have established, Whitten lived consistently on the move, from one painting technique to another and from place to place: first from the South to the North, from downtown to uptown, and later from New York to Crete. Glissant conceptualized such wandering states as *errance* (errantry).[170] In the introduction to Glissant's *Poetics of Relation*, translator Betsy Wing explains the term:

> Directed by Relation, errantry follows neither an arrowlike trajectory nor one that is circular and repetitive, nor is it mere wandering—idle roaming. Wandering, one might become lost, but in errantry one knows at every moment where one is—at every moment in relation to the other.[171]

Whitten's wanderings were not aimless: he drifted with intention. As I discussed in the first chapter, Whitten migrated in 1960 from the South to the North in an effort to escape

the racism he experienced as a child and as a student activist during the height of the Civil Rights Movement. At the onset of the 1970s, as I chronicle in chapter two, he resolved to experience Greece—visiting Europe for the first time—a trip which began not only his life-long sojourns to the Greek island of Crete but also fueled his love for travel.[172]

Whitten's errantry played a significant role in shaping his identity not only as a person but as an artist.[173] In her essay "Continental Drift: The Sculptures of Jack Whitten," Baum also underscores the importance of Whitten's wanderings, explaining that his nomadic sensibility is not only central to his life story, but his practice:

> Clearly, Whitten spent a great deal of his life on the move, in a perpetual sequence of dislocation and relocation, disidentification and reidentification. His itinerancy is not just a biographical sidenote: the geography of his intellectual development is key to understanding the form and content of his [work], as is his general propensity for crossing borders and establishing contact with a wide range of cultures and communities.[174]

As Baum remarked, it is this continuous cycle of dislocation and relocation, disidentification and reidentification, this lack of static roots, that appears so strongly in Whitten's continuous development of experimental painting techniques.[175]

As I have discussed, leaving the South and moving to New York in the 1960s shaped Whitten. As an artist, he adopted an abstract expressionist style from the New York School, and as a person, he gained a new consciousness around the complexities of race, which led him to think about his self as Black in a more nuanced way. His next migration to Crete at the onset of the 1970s facilitated a connection to Africa and its diaspora. On a personal level, this new relation informed Whitten's identity as a member of the African diaspora, and also impacted his identity as an artist: engaging with his

African heritage through sculpture led Whitten to developing new painting methods, which—as he has remarked—reoriented his practice. By the time he created *Atopolis* in 2014, he had lived between New York and Crete and traveled the globe for many years. His identity, as a result, was shaped by these years of contact, exchange, and new experiences, all of which informed his perception of himself as a global citizen.

The way Whitten imagines himself as a global citizen—free of fixed and binary forms of identity—recalls Glissant's conceptualization of identity. Glissant believed that the idea of rooted identity was limiting and had become irrelevant in the age of relation due to globalization and the mixing of people and cultures. "When identity is determined by a root," Glissant remarked, "the emigrant is condemned (especially in the second generation) to being split and flattened. Usually an outcast in the place he has newly set anchor, he is forced into impossible attempts to reconcile his former and his present belongings."[176] Glissant instead viewed identity as something constantly changing and evolving. In his essay "Distancing, Determining," he writes, "Identity is no longer just permanence; it is a capacity for variation, yes, a variable—either under control or wildly fluctuating."[177] Whitten's multi-layered identity parallels Glissant's concept of *relation-identity,* which as the philosopher explained, is the result of the collisions, exchanges, and interactions of relation. For Glissant, relation identity:

> does not devise any legitimacy as its guarantee of entitlement, but circulates, newly extended; does not think of a land as a territory from which to project toward other territories but as a place where one gives-on-and-with rather than grasps. Relation identity exults the thought of errantry and of totality.[178]

It seems likely that Whitten identified with relation-identity, as his identity, formed through accumulating new layers throughout his many migrations, was constantly evolving.

Yet amidst all the travel, new experiences, and dispersed roots as the result of relations in New York, Crete and elsewhere, Whitten never lost sight of his southern roots. If *Atopolis* responds to Glissant's concept of relation, Whitten's strong identification with the South suggests one reason why he chose to give the painting a center. Despite his constant movement, he remained tethered to his upbringing as a Southerner, as a Black man raised in the segregated city of Bessemer, Alabama. He referred to being out in the world, but simultaneously connected to his Southern roots, as his "southern sensibility." In public conversations, Whitten often addressed his southern sensibility as something that the audience should be aware of because he believed it was crucial to understanding his work. In his 2008 Forum Network talk with then-curator of the Atlanta Contemporary Arts Center Stuart Horodner, Whitten remarked on the importance of his southern sensibility stating, "The south is what forms me. I'm a great believer in what I call southern sensibility." [179] In his 2016 lecture at NYU's Institute of Fine Arts, Whitten emphasized his background, stressing his belief that one's background greatly informs one's identity. At the very beginning of his lecture, he addressed the audience, remarking:

> It is important I give you a brief introduction to my background because it is our background, which provides the underpinning to our sensibility, a crucial element in making art. I am a product of American apartheid. My life has been shaped and continues to be shaped by the politics of race in America.[180]

Whitten's background was rooted in the South, specifically Bessemer, Alabama, which was the source of his Southern sensibility. As he alludes, the experiences he had growing up a young Black man in the segregated South deeply affected him and were central to the formation of his identity. His southern sensibility was not just a biographical aside, it was a key component of his identity and also played a significant role in informing his art. This emphasis on southern sensibility is also reflected in his studio notes, where in an entry for September 24th, 2009, he states:

> I have no choice but to accept the fact: art can be anything the artist wants it to be. I must clarify the utmost of my ability: what is my art? First of all my approach to art is embedded within my southern sensibility. I am from Bessemer, Ala. This is very important. Not only am I from Bessemer I am black of African descent. Everything I do is informed by these simple facts.[181]

While he was networked to other people and places, Whitten's own words make it clear that he felt anchored by and to his southern roots, which it seems, were a core part of his identity. This notion carries over into *Atopolis*, where by including a center, Whitten seems to suggest that everyone has a central identity or a place from which his or her identity derives.

Light

Importantly, Whitten used light, reflecting off tesserae or absorbed by deep black patches, to represent *Atopolis*' both-city-and-cosmos geography. His errance developed his interest in light as well. On a trip to Egypt in January of 2001, he and his wife Mary visited St. Catherine's Monastery in Mount Sinai, where he experienced another artistic revelation. Inspired by St. Catherine's Justinian-era mosaics, specifically the quality of

light they cast, Whitten realized that he could sculpt light by using tesserae as well. "The tesserae is a three-dimensional unit of acrylic paint and I have found that I can direct the light with it," he later explained.[182] Reflecting on the experience in a 2009 interview he stated:

> These things [St. Catherine's mosaics] were built to be shown in candlelight. They were not built to be shown in incandescent light or outdoor light. They were interior space, monasteries, churches. In the candlelight, each tessera, the master who's making them, his stone is directing the light. Boy, boy, boy my head went off. I had a revelation. I thought I would start screaming. This thing is coming alive because of the candlelight. The master's thumb is [setting the tesserae into wet mortar deliberately to reflect the light] – fucking light's being thrown off it, gorgeous, gorgeous, gorgeous, gorgeous, gorgeous![183]

It was the quality of light produced by the master's thumb that attracted Whitten to the ancient technique.[184] "Those early mosaics were built to capture the light and to redirect it," he explained.[185] Each tesserae was set "in such a way that it would hit to govern light and reflect light,"[186] and positioned at an angle so that it "collects the light and throws it off very specifically," Whitten said.[187] "I'm building the tesserae in such a way to redirect the light, same as those ancients did it," he remarked.[188] His experience viewing the mosaics at St. Catherine's in Egypt strongly affected his approach to his mosaic paintings, as he began to cant tesserae from then on, a development of his direct method mosaic technique, which he used for his tribute to Glissant thirteen years later.

The dynamism between darkness and light in *Atopolis* results from this technique. The painting pushes and pulls the light that the painting both absorbs and emanates. The tesserae literally generate light, which reflects and scatters off their individual surfaces and illuminates the composition. The dense black patches (not tesserae, these are acrylic casts of surfaces and objects) contrast the reflected light of the tesserae, soaking up light

instead. “That light [in *Atopolis*],” Whitten describes, “is pure aluminum pigment.”[189] In these dark spaces, Whitten instead used an extremely dense nano-pigment called Spindel black, “the deepest black possible.”[190] Spindel black, he explains, “sucks in the light .... While the Spindel is sucking in the light, the aluminum is throwing out the light, so you get this powerful play off light sources between what is being soaked in and what is being reflected.”[191] In *Atopolis*, the deep black and bright aluminum play off one another to create a stark juxtaposition between the presence and absence of light.

“So one could say my belief in painting depends on light. It’s light. It’s all about light,” Whitten remarked in a 2015 conversation.[192] As Richard Shiff explains, “The study of perception, not its mere reflection in illustrative imagery, became Whitten’s self-assignment as a visual artist.”[193] Whitten’s interest in and emphasis on light manifested in his work from the beginning and evolved as he developed new processes. As I discuss in Chapter 2, his 1970 tribute to Malcolm X is an example of the artist engaging with a new process, driven by the desire to reveal the inner light of the painting. In *Homage to Malcolm*, one of his earliest experiments sculpting light with paint, Whitten used tools to excavate the light trapped under the painting’s surface. Three decades later, in *Atopolis*, he was still engaged with sculpting light, but used as his vehicle canted acrylic tesserae, which reflected light in multiple directions.

Whitten believed that light was a conduit for both expression and information.[194] “In painting, all information is carried by light,” the artist remarked in a 2010 studio log entry.[195] However, as Shiff describes, this kind of information was typically not biographical or historical in nature, “but a set of feelings, a complex of sensations and

emotions."[196] In a 1997 interview, Whitten recalled thinking about the photographic process as a method to capture information—feelings, sensations, and emotions—an idea he would later translate into his paintings. He recalls that in 1965 he internalized this information, and as a result began to conceptualize himself as a camera:

> In 1965, I wrote on the wall of my studio, 'The image is photographic; therefore, I must photograph my thoughts.' Obviously the metaphor was photography. I saw in Pollock light, energy, emotions, captured in paint through speed. Photography used a determinant amount of light to capture pictorial illusions onto a light-sensitive support. This simple fact has always intrigued painters and influenced their approach to painting. At first, to photograph my thoughts was very unsettling because I sincerely thought that my head was a camera! It caused a lot of emotional problems.[197]

In comparing himself to a camera, Whitten indicates his interest in capturing light in his paintings but differentiates his work from photography's secondary function as a representation of things other than light itself. As the artist states, "My images were coming out of matter; they were not coming out of illustrational processes."[198] In a 1988 studio note Whitten stressed that, "The image comes from the material … I must remove the metaphor, whatever it may be."[199] Elaborating on this concept, Shiff explains that Whitten's impulse to reproduce matter and the unarticulated images of his mind had to do with his desire to reproduce the process of photography, not the look of it:

> While some of his contemporaries identified themselves as photorealists and replicated the *look* of photography, Whitten made objects that embodied a *process* analogous to photographic technology. Other painters produced "pictures," images that referred beyond their immediate presence to something external in place and time—something absent … To the contrary, Whitten created a material object conceived not to refer in the sense of depicting, but to become its own image, even when it served as a personal memorial.[200]

Reflecting on this revelation, Shiff states, Whitten's "vision of a photographic process—photographing his mind, his perception—determined the course of his material experimentation from that moment onward."[201] For the duration of his career, he thought

about light through the framework of photography, and specifically looked to light to capture the intangible.

Soul

I depend both upon the spiritual and the material out of psychic necessity.[202]

The density of both [music and light] depends upon the density of soul.[203]

As Whitten perceived it, light was not only a carrier of information in the form of feelings, sensations and emotions, but also a complex type of information: soul. Whitten saw the light in his paintings as capturing something that he called both essence and soul at different times. "We are familiar with things being either/or, abstract or representational, but there's a third order out there that's not abstract, nor is it representation …" he once observed, "You have to go beyond the notion of just bringing them together."[204] *The Oxford English Dictionary* in one entry defines soul as, "The essential, immaterial, or spiritual part of a person or animal, as opposed to the physical."[205] Soul, the *OED* describes, could be understood as existing in Whitten's third order. According to Whitten, soul—or spirit, essence—is difficult to capture. It evades categorization and representation, he explains:

> It's … an image that comes out of matter … It's a theme. It's a presence. It's when one relates to a presence in something. I'm aware of something being caught in the matter. But again, the difficult part is, how do you direct it how do you construct it? If it's not an illustration of something, then what is it? This thing has its own mind, its own body. It's similar to animists who believe that all matter holds something in it … There's a relation here when I speak of spirit and matter. That it is possible to direct something in the matter.[206]

Throughout his career, as Shiff notes, Whitten attempted to catch soul in paint. "'The power is within me," he wrote in 1987: 'It must come directly from the soul unhindered

by logic.'"[207] He did so by directing spirit into matter using light, which he believed imbued his paintings with the essence of his subjects and at times—including in *King's Wish (Martin Luther's Dream)*, *Homage to Malcolm,* and *Atopolis*—his own self, or soul.[208]

Whitten believed that soul, like light, traveled in waves and envisioned waves of light as analogous to jazz musician John Coltrane's waves of sound.[209] "In John Coltrane's music there is this phenomenon that we refer to as a sheet of sound. As a painter, I experience sound that way, light operating in a sheet … a sheet of light, a plane of light," Whitten remarked.[210] In a 1994 interview with Kenneth Goldsmith, he explained that his light in painting could be compared to Coltrane's sound.[211] Speaking to Coltrane's ability to capture waves of sound in an interview with curator Henry Geldzahler from 1983, Whitten elaborates: "Coltrane told me how he equated his sound to sheets: the sound you hear in his music comes at you in waves. When they say 'Training [Trane-ing] in,' it's about that sound coming in in waves. He catches it when it comes by …"[212] The concept of Coltrane capturing sound waves in turn influenced Whitten's concept of capturing waves of light. He explains:

> I think that, in plastic terms, translating from sound, I was sensing sheets, waves of light. A sheet of light passing, that's how I was seeing light. That's why I refer to these paintings as energy fields. I often thought of them as two poles that create a magnetic field in which light is trapped.[213]

As Shiff notes, "Perhaps soul represents a condensation and compression of waves, as well as their generative source."[214] Based on this association, Shiff postulates that waves of light enter Whitten's painting through his light-emitting acrylic tesserae, which attracts and emits all sorts of energy waves, including soul:

> The painter's waves of light passed seamlessly into the "energy fields" that his acrylic matter embodied, as if the material were emitting wave energy of all sorts: not only light and sound, but also electromagnetism and even brain waves that carry both feeling and thought—waves of soul.[215]

In a studio note from December 2007, Whitten had a revelation about this very process and came to a similar conclusion: "Now I understand. The paint as matter is the material + light is carried within the material. Light is matter. All information is carried within the light. If I let go + follow the light … the world is my oyster!"[216]

In *Atopolis*, Whitten used light to convey a sense of Glissant's essence. In a 2008 studio note he wrote, "EVERYTHING WE EXPERIENCE IS COMPRESSED INTO LIGHT … INCLUDING SPACE. ALL THAT I AM—MY WHOLE IDENTITY IS COMPRESSED INTO LIGHT."[217] Whitten believed that through his process, he could compress spirit into matter, through light. Applying the concept that light is able to inhabit three-dimensional space and can be captured as waves, Whitten canted the tesserae, so that each captured and redirected light, even as the painting's surface absorbed it. In other words, the tesserae attracted soul and in turn dispersed it back into the acrylic matter of his painting. By harnessing the light that reflected off the surface of the tesserae, Whitten enabled the conditions for Glissant's spirit to be compressed into light and enter the acrylic matter.[218]

Soul, accordingly, entered *Atopolis* from myriad directions radiated by the tesserae from multiple angles. Describing the artist's process, Shiff states:

> He cant[s] the units slightly, so they absorb light from multiple directions and reflect it back in expanding waves of luminescence. His method expresse[s]—or perhaps liberate[s]—the soul of the material, of the color, of the light. He [does] not depict something that possessed soul; rather, he establishe[s] soul itself within the matter of his painting.[219]

It is light, as the conjurer of spirit, that brings Glissant's and Whitten's souls together. Through his process of directing spirit into matter using light, Whitten invites Glissant's soul to inhabit *Atopolis*. Through light, "Whitten [gives] soul,"—in this case, Glissant's soul— "a visual presence, a reality," Shiff observes.[220]

Whitten's soul in *Atopolis*

As Whitten draws in Glissant's soul, he simultaneously draws in his own, creating in his words "a soul space," where his and Glissant's souls commune.[221] If *Atopolis* recalls a Gestalt visual experiment in the form of a city and cosmos, it can also be interpreted as an image that represents both Glissant and Whitten. Though Whitten memorializes Glissant in *Atopolis,* he does so in an unorthodox manner by expressing the memory of Glissant through the lens of his own experience of the philosopher's work. In his 2014 *Mousse Magazine* article, "From New York, Southward: A Counter-Memorial," curator Thomas J. Lax discusses this kind of memorial work, which he identifies as a "counter- memorial," based on James E. Young's term "counter-monument."[222] For Young, artists who create a counter-monument, approach the memorialization process differently, as "instead of seeking to capture memory of events … they remember their own relationship to events."[223] Whitten it seems, approached memorializing Glissant along these lines, thinking of Glissant in relation to his concepts and his own experience of them. While *Atopolis* is dedicated to Glissant, and visually embodies the Martiniquean scholar's philosophies, it is also very much about Whitten, who interpreted Glissant's

concepts of relation, creolization and relation-identity, through his own conceptualizing of his identity as a human, Black man, and artist.

Like Glissant in his books, Whitten often referred to the implications of the African diasporism: to a lack of place, a sense of dislocation and the diasporic rupture of cultures, in his studio log entries and interviews. He once remarked, "Slavery eliminated our sense of place. Blacks had no choice but to recreate a sense of place."[224] Whitten, it seems, looked to recover this sense of place in *Atopolis*. The artist states:

> The history of a people, in my personal case, that of the slave: uprooted, torn + dismembered, piece by piece, fragmented, + scattered to various geographical locations far removed from origins of birth, language, religion, political constructs, family, adrift in the MIDDLE PASSAGE, abandoned by all known civilized norms of behavior: This to [*sic*] must be addressed.[225]

In a 1994 studio log entry, Whitten addressed this fracture and his intent to fix it: "It's my culture that I am putting back together. Due to Slavery, it was fractured and its'[*sic*] my job as an artist to put it back together."[226] In *Atopolis,* Whitten seems to be putting his culture back together using Glissant's concepts such as relation and creolization as a blueprint or framework to do so. He pieces together the individual acrylic tesserae, derived from different sources, to form a coherent new whole, creating in the process a new general sense of place. In the process he also puts himself back together, as he pieces his different identities into one identity as a transnational global citizen. Returning to its dual nature, *Atopolis,* as such, seems to symbolize the place Whitten carved for himself in the world illustrated by the image of the city, but the painting also simultaneously represents utopic universalism, depicted by the cosmos, where, in an ideal world, "there is no need for the OTHER," a vision shared by Glissant.[227]

*

In *Atopolis*, Whitten looked to establish a new sense of place, one that paralleled Glissant's concepts, specifically relation and creolization, but also one that spoke to his southern sensibility and experience as a citizen of the world. *Atopolis* demonstrates both Glissant's and Whitten's interest in nonhierarchical notions and pluralistic social vision, which Whitten reflects upon in an October 1996 studio log entry: "My objective is to make use of pluralism: pluralism is a conceptual armature. This gives me an enormous amount of freedom. The universe becomes my sandbox!"[228] In another entry he states, "I WANT AN ART THAT REFLECT [*sic*] THE DIVERSITY WHICH I SEE AROUND ME."[229] *Atopolis*, with its reflective surface, literally reflects the diversity to which Whitten refers. If, as Whitten suggests, light equals soul, then the light reflecting off the tesserae equates to that soul being diverse. As a new place that embodies diversities, *Atopolis* also embodies a new worldview: Whitten's worldview as a citizen of the world. Shaped by his experiences with different people and cultures from diverse places, Whitten's worldview is reflected in *Atopolis*, which he imbued through his medium and method, which in turn speak to his open-mindedness, nonhierarchical thinking and resistance to polar binaries.

As I have discussed, Whitten viewed light as an information carrier. As he used light to imbue paintings with soul, he also seems to have looked to light to carry his worldview and pluralistic sensibility into his art, where light would represent an expansion of freedom: freedom from dominance, oppression, categorization, a world in relation. "Art," Whitten wrote in a 1996 studio note, "has always been about freedom.

The artist[‘s] job is to continue the expansion of freedom...to unveil another layer of consciousness.”[230] *Atopolis*, then, is a statement about freedom, and the freedom Whitten found by locating his identity and place in the world.

Conclusion

In his 2018 essay "Why Do I Carve Wood?" Whitten reflects on identity. The search for identity, he says, is the reason he began carving wood in the early 1960s, and he emphasizes the sixties as a period of time in which he tried to find himself. As I have discussed, he went through many changes during this period: migrating from the South to the North, where he moved from a segregated society to New York City's relatively more integrated environment, while he was in the midst of trying to find his artistic voice. These changes had an effect on his conception of self: "Identity," he writes, "was not an issue in my youth. Alabama was a known brutal racist state. I grew up always knowing that I was Black. I did not know the word 'identity' as a racial concept until I arrived in New York in 1960."[231] In New York of the 1960s, Whitten began the journey to locate his conception of self, which he would continue across the Atlantic for the next forty-plus years.

"HOW I PERCEIVE THE WORLD CONSTITUTE [*sic*] MY PERSONAL IDENTITY. MY PERSONAL IDENTITY IS THE TEMPLATE FOR WORLDVIEW," Whitten wrote in a 2009 studio note.[232] This notion that Whitten's identity determines his view of the world underlies *King's Wish (Martin Luther's Dream), Homage to Malcolm* and *Atopolis: For Édouard Glissant*. In each, we see how Whitten is influenced by social, political, and ideological factors and how these factors contribute to his conception of self and shape his worldview. Whitten, influenced by King, Jr.'s teachings, begins to differentiate race from identity in *King's Wish (Martin Luther's Dream)*. Subscribing to Dr. King's belief that Black people were more than the color of their skin, he began to

view himself, as reiterated throughout the earlier parts of this thesis, not just as a Black man, but as a Black American and a Black American artist.

Whitten's 1970 travels across the Atlantic greatly affected his perception of his personal and artistic identity. This period, as I argue in chapter two, is pivotal for him. Like Malcolm X—a fellow African American, who a few years earlier began to identify with Pan-Africanist ideology after travels to the Arab world and Africa—in Crete, Whitten too begins to connect with his African roots through carving wood after African sculpture. This experience of engaging with Pan-Africanism shaped Whitten's identity and influenced his worldview, leading him from the personal to the universal and from being Black in America to Black in the world.

Inspired by the writings of Glissant, Whitten would ultimately locate his place in the world between many places. He found the identity he sought in the freedom of errantry, bringing different places together in an all-encompassing, nonhierarchical worldview, anchored by his southern sensibility (though this last was Whitten's own riff on Glissant's ideas). He came to perceive himself not just as a Black man, a Black American, a Black American artist, or a Pan-Africanist, but having become free from binary categories, he would identify as a transnational citizen of the world.

While his earlier paintings from the 1960s such as *King's Wish (Martin Luther's Dream)*, represent the beginning stages of Whitten's identity formation, which reflect being Black in America, later paintings such as *Atopolis: For Édouard Glissant* represent the evolution of Whitten's identity, the culmination of personal experience and

absorption of influences over the course of 75 years, reflecting his status in the 2000s—forty-six years after painting *King's Wish*—as being Black in the world.

Figures

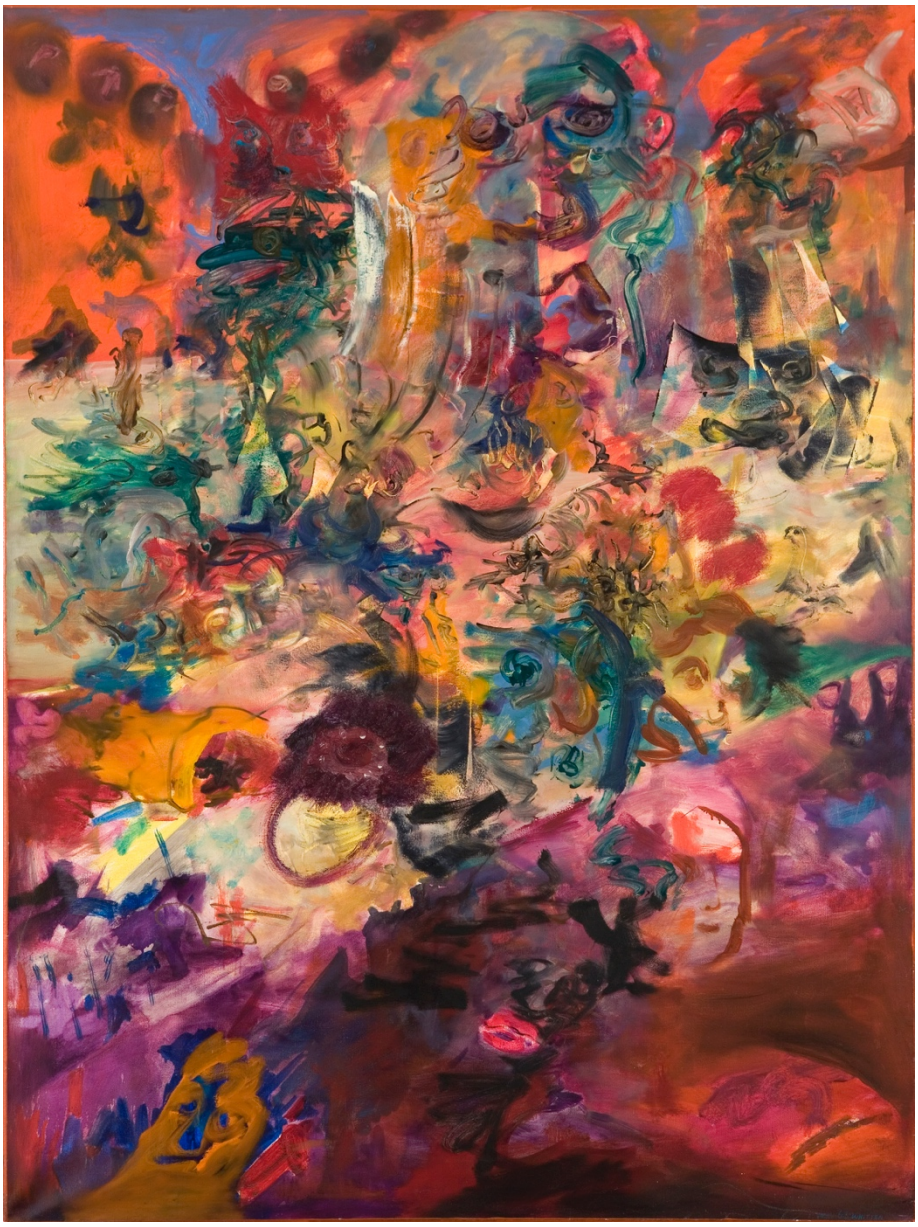

Figure 1. Jack Whitten, *King's Wish (Martin Luther's Dream),* 1968, oil on canvas, 67 7/8 x 51 ¾ in (172.4 x 131.45 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Alexander Gray Associates, New York. Image: Courtesy Alexander Gray Associates, New York © 2015 Jack Whitten/Artist Rights Society (ARS), New York.

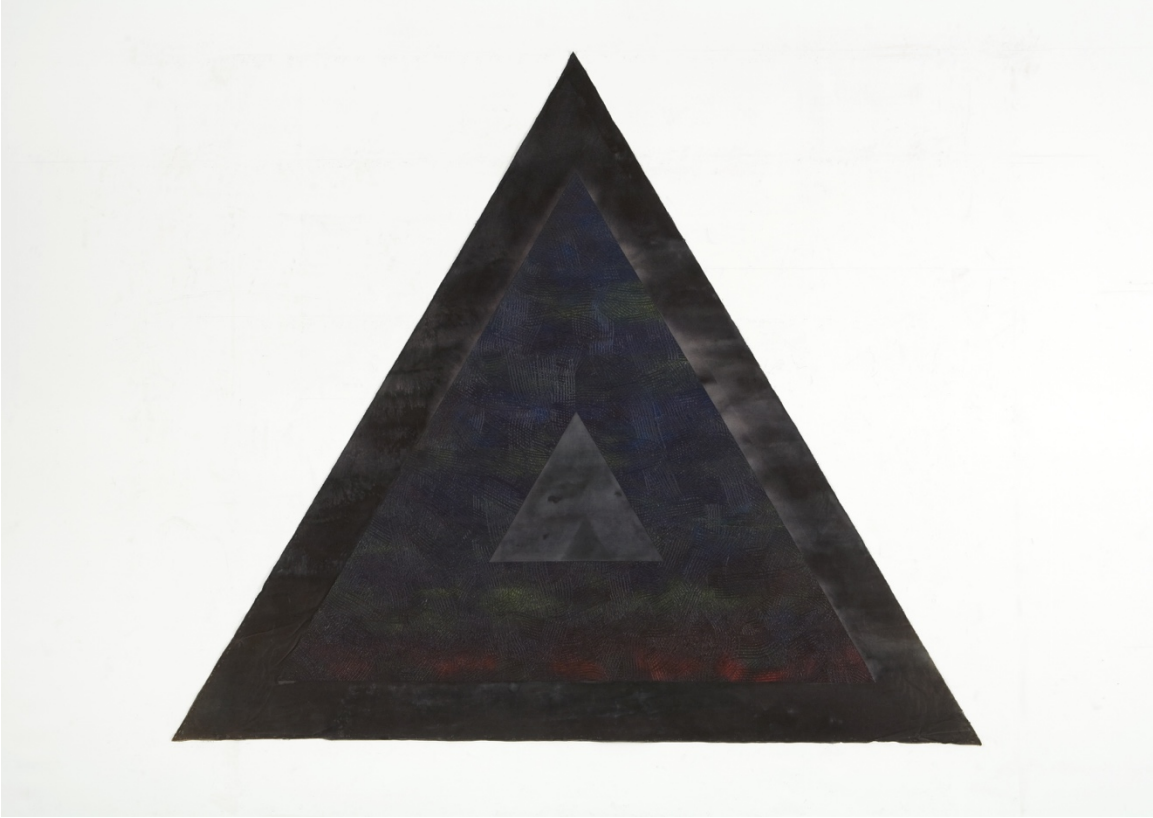

Figure 2. Jack Whitten, *Homage to Malcolm*, 1970, acrylic paint on canvas, 100.5 x 199.4 in (255.3 x 303.5 cm). Courtesy of the Estate of Jack Whitten and Hauser & Wirth.

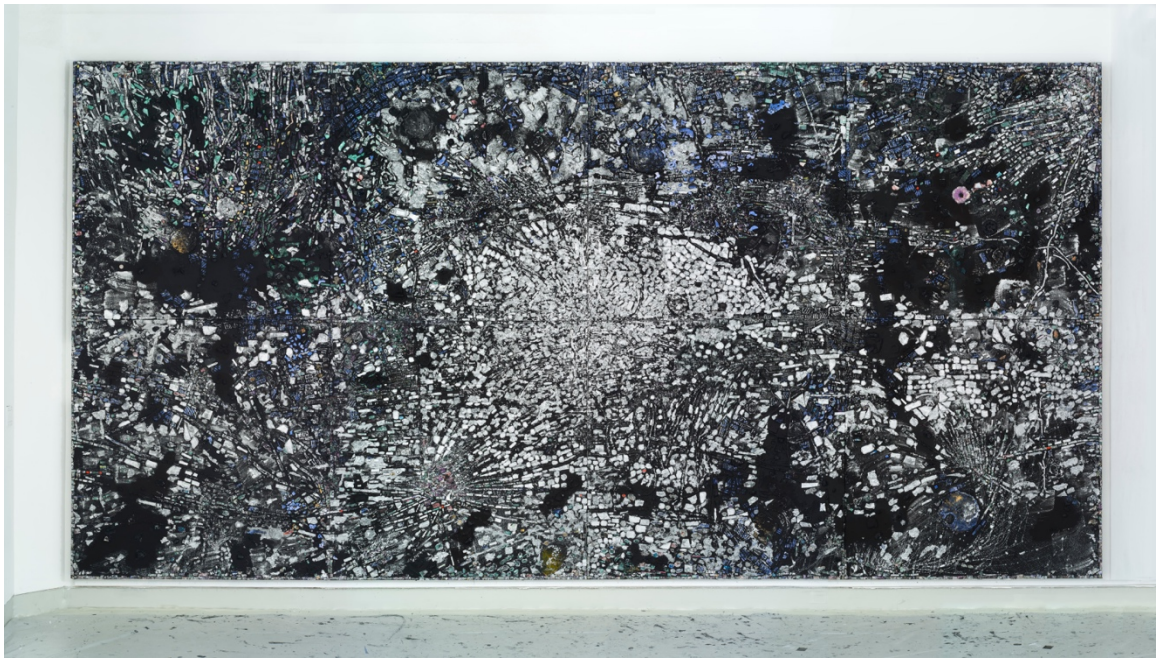

Figure 3. Jack Whitten, *Atopolis: For Édouard Glissant*, 2014, acrylic on canvas, 8 panels, Overall: 10 ft 4 ½ in x 20 ft 8. ½ in (316.2 x 631.2 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Acquired through the generosity of Sid R. Bass, Lonti Ebers, Agnes Gund, Henry and Marie-Josée Kravis, Jerry Speyer and Katherine Farley, and Daniel and Brett Sundheim.

Figure 4. Willem de Kooning, *Woman I*, 1950-52, oil and metallic paint on canvas, 6 ft 3 7/8 x 58 in (192.7 x 147.3 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. © 2019 The Willem de Kooning Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Figure 5. Jack Whitten, *Homage to Malcolm*, 1965, partly stained American elm, coiled wire, nails, and mixed media, 18 in x 6 ft 3 in x 13 in (45.7. x 190.5 x 33 cm). Collection the artist's estate.

Notes to Text, Pages 1-66

[1] Jack Whitten, quoted in Linda DeBarry, "An Interview with Artist Jack Whitten," *Crystal Bridges*, 23 Jan 2018, https://crystalbridges.org/blog/an-interview-with-artist-jack-whitten/ (accessed on 27 May 2019).
[2] Studio note dated October 28, 1991. Jack Whitten, quoted in Jack Whitten and Katy Siegel, ed., *Jack Whitten: Notes from the Woodshed* (New York: Hauser & Wirth, 2018) 216.
[3] Studio note dated January 26-31, 1973. Whitten, quoted in Siegel, *Jack Whitten: Notes from the Woodshed,* 44.
[4] Whitten, quoted in "Letter to Henry Geldzahler," February 8, 1983, in Henry Geldzahler, *Jack Whitten: Ten Years—1970-1980* (New York: The Studio Museum in Harlem, 1983) 4.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Whitten, "On Being a Man," (June 24, 1964), in Siegel, *Jack Whitten: Notes from the Woodshed*, 37-38.
[7] The exact number of paintings Whitten created dedicated to Martin Luther King, Jr. is unknown due to some of the works being destroyed in a fire. In Judith Olch Richard's oral interview with the artist for the Smithsonian Archives of American Art from 2009, Whitten estimates he created approximately seven or eight, stating, "There's more than one, exact number I couldn't tell you off the top of my head. But it's got to be at least seven or eight of them." Jack Whitten, quoted in Judith Olch Richards, "Oral History Interview with Jack Whitten 2009, Dec. 1-3," *Smithsonian Archives of American Art,* https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-jack-whitten-15748#transcript (accessed on 12 Mar. 2018). Meanwhile, Kathryn Kanjo in her essay "Facing Abstraction," suggests that there are approximately ten. Kathryn Kanjo, "Facing Abstraction," in Kathryn Kanjo, ed., *Jack Whitten: Five Decades of Painting* (San Diego: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2015) 24.
[8] Stuart Horodner, "Jack Whitten: Memory and Method," in Jack Whitten and Stuart Horodner, *Jack Whitten: Memorial Paintings* (Atlanta: Atlanta Contemporary Art Center, 2008) 17.
[9] Whitten describes his work from this period: "You have to keep in mind that I was dealing with the themes I was in the '60s out of necessity. I was dealing with the pressure of being a black in America. And keep in mind I'm not talking about some kind of intellectual choice here. This was a psychological necessity. It's just there, and you have to work with it. You work with it, or it works you." Whitten quoted in The Center Gallery of Bucknell University, *Since the Harlem Renaissance*: *50 Years of Afro-American Art* (Lewisburg, PA: Center Gallery of Bucknell University, 1985) 43.
[10] In "Jack Whitten: An African-American and Pollock," Whitten states, "After I did all of those autobiographical paintings in the sixties, which were designed to find out who Jack Whitten was—there was a lot of about sexuality, religion, politics—and I sort of got that under my belt, established a kind of identity." Whitten, quoted in "Jack Whitten: An African-American and Pollock," in Jeanne Siegel, *Painting After Pollock: Structures of Influence* (Amsterdam: G+B Arts International, 1999) 131.
[11] Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., "I Have a Dream," speech, August 28, 1963, Washington, D.C., https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/i-have-dream-address-delivered-march-washington-jobs-and-freedom (accessed on 1 Apr. 2019).
[12] Whitten was present for the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, in which Dr. King delivered his landmark "I Have a Dream" speech. Jack Whitten, audio recording, *Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego*, 2015, https://www.mcasd.org/artworks/martin-luther-kings-garden (accessed on 19 Feb. 2019).
[13] The Poor People's Campaign was aimed at the residents of Northern urban communities who felt disenfranchised and frustrated due to the stagnation in progress and lack of change in their own lives, despite recent advances the saw made in the south. "Poor People's Campaign," *The Martin Luther King, Jr.*

Research and Education Institute, Stanford, https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/poor-peoples-campaign (accessed on 27 Mar. 2019).

[14] The Poor People's Campaign advocated for jobs, unemployment insurance, a fair minimum wage and education for poor adults and youth with the intent to improve self-esteem and self-image, for all people facing economic adversity, both black and white. Ibid.

[15] Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Other America," speech, April 14, 1967, Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA, https://www.crmvet.org/docs/otheram.htm (accessed on 30 Apr. 2019).

[16] According to King, African Americans were worse off in 1967 than they had been fifteen or twenty years prior: schools in the North were more segregated than before 1954's Brown vs. Board of Education decision, the unemployment rate—which at one time had been close to that of whites—had doubled and their average income at the time was 50% less than white Americans. In his speech, King laments that while civil rights activists made gains with the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Bill of 1965, the accommodations that were made as a result were matters of human decency and not strides toward true equity. Desegregating lunch counters, public transportation and department stores was one thing, King says, but achieving real equality would be another struggle altogether. Ibid.

[17] Initially hesitant to publicly oppose the war and denounce the actions of President Lyndon B. Johnson—who was considered an ally of the civil rights movement and had recently signed into law the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts of 1964 and 1965, respectively—Dr. King felt pressure from his contemporaries to refrain from commenting on Vietnam. Advocates of the Civil Rights Movement did not want Dr. King's opinions to jeopardize the recent civil rights legislative gains, nor, with future actions and progress in mind, hurt his political standing with the President. His political adversaries, on the other hand, feared that Dr. King's anti-war statements could be influential in swaying the public's opinion of the war, and would turn the population against the government's actions in Vietnam. Many allies and adversaries thought that Dr. King should focus on civil rights and leave the topic of Vietnam alone. Thus, King, claiming he could no longer remain silent, stated: "a time comes when silence is betrayal. That time has come for us in relation to Vietnam." As such, he made a public statement denouncing the war in Vietnam including his justifications for doing so on April 4, 1967. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.,"Beyond Vietnam," speech, April 4, 1967, New York, NY, https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/beyond-vietnam (accessed on 30 Apr. 2019).

[18] Ibid.

[19] George McGovern, "Introduction to Beyond Vietnam," in Clayborne Carson and Kris Shepard, eds., *A Call to Conscience: The Landmark Speeches of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Warner Books, Inc, 2001) 134.

[20] Whitten, quoted in "Perspectives at the Blanton: Jack Whitten and Kellie Jones," Blanton Museum of Art, Austin, Texas, February 22, 2015, audio recording, https://soundcloud.com/blantonmuseum/jack-whitten-kellie-jones-lecture-february-2015 (accessed on 1 Apr. 2019).

[21] Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Casualties of the War in Vietnam," speech, February 25, 1967, Los Angeles, CA, https://investigatinghistory.ashp.cuny.edu/module11D.php (accessed on 25 Mar. 2019).

[22] Whitten, quoted in "Perspectives at the Blanton: Jack Whitten and Kellie Jones."

[23] Whitten, quoted in Olch Richards, "Oral History Interview with Jack Whitten 2009, Dec. 1-3." In the conversation "Jack Whitten: An African American and Pollock," between Whitten and curator Jeanne Siegel, Whitten states: "Now I must say, the sixties works, 1960 to 1970, were figurative expressionist, autobiographical paintings... But that first ten years' body of work that I showed at Alan Stone was purely autobiographical." Whitten, quoted in "Jack Whitten: An African American and Pollock," in Siegel, *Painting After Pollock: Structures of Influence,* 130.

[24] "I was always interested in civil rights. My mother led voter registration rights. At home, my mother would have meetings with the local people where she taught how to pass those tests. In those days, black people had to pass a test to become a registered voter. Plus, you had to pay a poll tax. My mama used to have meetings where she would teach people how to pass those test." Whitten, quoted in Olch Richards, "Oral History Interview with Jack Whitten 2009, Dec. 1-3."
[25] Whitten, audio recording, *Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego*.
[26] Whitten, quoted in Siegel, *Jack Whitten: Notes from the Woodshed*, 17.
[27] Jack Whitten, quoted in "The Art of Jack Whitten, Jack Whitten and Stuart Horodner," Forum Lectures, *Forum Network*, May 15, 2008, http://forum-network.org/lectures/the-art-jack-whitten/ (accessed on 27 Mar. 2019).
[28] Whitten, quoted in Horodner, *Jack Whitten: Memorial Paintings*, 59.
[29] Dean Sinclair, "Equal in All Places: The Civil Rights Struggle in Baton Rouge 1953-1963," *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association*, vol. 39, No. 3 (Summer, 1998) 360.
[30] Jack Whitten, quoted in Jarrett Earnest, "Art Conversation: Jack Whitten with Jarrett Earnest," *Brooklyn Rail*, Feb. 1, 2017, https://brooklynrail.org/2017/02/art/JACK-WHITTEN-with-Jarrett-Earnest (accessed on 12 Mar. 2018).
[31] Jack Whitten, quoted in Robert Storr, "In Conversation: Jack Whitten with Robert Storr," *The Brooklyn Rail,* 4 Sept. 2007, https://brooklynrail.org/2007/9/art/whitten (accessed on Mar. 12, 2018).
[32] Jack Whitten, "Chronology," in Katy Siegel, *Odyssey: Jack Whitten Sculpture 1963-2017* (Baltimore, MD: Baltimore Museum of Art and New York, NY: Gregory R. Miller & Co., 2018) 177.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Whitten, quoted in Horodner, *Jack Whitten: Memorial Paintings*, 59.
[35] Whitten, quoted in "Perspectives at the Blanton: Jack Whitten and Kellie Jones."
[36] Whitten, quoted in Olch Richards, "Oral History Interview with Jack Whitten 2009, Dec. 1-3."
[37] Ibid.
[38] Whitten, quoted in Geldzahler, *Jack Whitten: Ten Years—1970-1980,* 4.
[39] Whitten, quoted in Beryl J. Wright, *Jack Whitten* (Newark, NJ: Newark Museum, 1990) 7.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Whitten, quoted in Storr, "In Conversation: Jack Whitten with Robert Storr."
[42] Whitten, quoted in Geldzahler, *Jack Whitten: Ten Years—1970-1980*, 4.
[43] Whitten, quoted in Olch Richards, "Oral History Interview with Jack Whitten 2009, Dec. 1-3."
[44] "Those paintings [works from the 1960s] are high-pitched emotionally and what happens in the emotion is pure chemistry. It's electric, there are charges in there." Whitten, quoted in Siegel, *Painting After Pollock*, 130.
[45] In the 1960s, many artists took an interest in the mind's inner workings. Seeking to expand their consciousness, they experimented with psychedelics, explored non-Western philosophies and spiritual traditions, and studied psychology and psychoanalysis. Jung became a cult figure for many, and his books populated second-hand bookstores. *Psyche and Symbol* from *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung* (first published in 1958), was widely read and discussed, particularly amongst artist circles in New York City. Speaking to his own experience with Jung, Whitten recalls, "That was a time when all of us [were] involved with the early writings of Jung, been introduced to Freud and everybody is toying with the notion of the subconscious." Whitten, quoted in Olch Richards, "Oral History Interview with Jack Whitten 2009, Dec. 1-3." Due to Jung's popularity at the time, *Psyche and Symbol* may have entered Whitten's orbit organically as Katy Siegel describes, "the ideas of which circulated as generalities in the air." Katy Siegel,

"Polytropos," in *Odyssey: Jack Whitten Sculpture 1963-2017*, 26; Richard Shiff recalled Jung's popularity at the time, email correspondence with the author, 21 March 2019.

[46] Whitten, quoted in Wright, *Jack Whitten*, 7.

[47] Violet S. de Laszlo, ed*., Psyche and Symbol A Selection from the Writings of C.G. Jung*, trans., R.F.C. Hull (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1958).

[48] Whitten has often remarked that he grew up as a painter amongst the abstract expressionists and that Abstract Expressionism was "his academy." Whitten, quoted in Olch Richards, "Oral History Interview with Jack Whitten 2009, Dec. 1-3;" Whitten, quoted in Geldzahler, *Jack Whitten: Ten Years—1970-1980,* 4.

[49] Teresa A. Carbone, "Exhibit A: Evidence and the Art Object," in Teresa A. Carbone and Kellie Jones, *Witness: Art and Civil Rights in the Sixties* (Brooklyn: Brooklyn Museum; New York: The Monacelli Press, 2014) 81.

[50] Whitten, quoted in Geldzahler*, Jack Whitten: Ten Years—1970-1980*, 4.

[51] Whitten, quoted in "Perspectives at the Blanton: Jack Whitten and Kellie Jones."

[52] Whitten, quoted in Olch Richards, "Oral History Interview with Jack Whitten 2009, Dec. 1-3."

[53] Carl Jung, *Carl Jung: The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, Vol. 9, part I of *The Collected Works* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990) 3.

[54] "Persona," *Oxford Reference Online*, https://www-oxfordreference-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100319947 (accessed on 10 May 2019).

[55] Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, 123.

[56] Ibid., 5.

[57] Ibid., 21.

[58] Jack Whitten, "Why Do I Carve Wood?" in Siegel, *Odyssey: Jack Whitten Sculpture 1963-2017,* 37-38.

[59] Whitten, quoted in Geldzahler, *Jack Whitten: Ten Years— 1970-1980*, 4.

[60] Although Whitten states, "That painting [*Homage to Malcolm*, 1970] was done right after the assassination," it was created five years later, as Malcolm X, who began referring to himself as el-Hajj Malik el-Shabazz in 1959 after his first trip to the Middle East and Africa, was assassinated in 1965. The artist's daughter, Mirsini Whitten-Amidon, explains that Whitten's sense of time was rather fluid and that he did not always begin memorial paintings immediately following the subject's death. "Dad didn't always do a painting for someone the year they died, often he would have an idea of "oh, I'd like to do a painting for so and so" but then he'd let the idea percolate instead of just rushing down to the studio to execute it. It's not so much that something "triggered" a painting, as much as an idea would marinate long enough and then work itself out. Yes, probably a good way to think of "right after" is loosely….and for my Dad, 5 years later would've still been thought of as "right after" when looking back at it from the vantage point of nearly 50 years later!" Email exchange with the author, 30 May 2019.

[61] The short film was created in conjunction with the Tate Museum's 2017 exhibition *Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power*. Jack Whitten, "The Political is in the Work," *TateShots*, Tate Museum, London, UK, https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=3&v=QzxhXbXGeTc, published on 6 Oct. 2017, (accessed on 30 May 2019).

[62] "The idea or principle of the political union of all African countries, of all the indigenous inhabitants of Africa, or of all people of African descent throughout the world; belief in or advocacy of this principle." "Pan-Africanism, n." *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, OED Third Edition, March 2005, https://www-oed-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/view/Entry/136664?redirectedFrom=pan-africanism#eid (accessed on 27 Jul. 2019).

[63] Whitten, quoted in Olch Richards, "Oral History Interview with Jack Whitten 2009, Dec. 1-3."
[64] Whitten, quoted in "Perspectives at the Blanton: Jack Whitten and Kellie Jones."
[65] The artist's admiration for de Kooning was evidently so strong that during a studio visit with fellow artist Lawrence Calcagno—an abstract expressionist painter a few years Whitten's senior—Calcagno opined, "Boy, you got some nice de Koonings here." Reflecting on this period in a 2015 conversation with art historian and curator Kellie Jones, Whitten remarked, "I realized that I had to do something to erase de Kooning's hand." Whitten, quoted in "Perspectives at the Blanton: Jack Whitten and Kellie Jones."
[66] "The search for identity led me to carving wood," Whitten states in his essay "Why Do I Carve Wood?" Whitten, quoted in Siegel, *Odyssey: Jack Whitten Sculpture 1963-2017,* 38; "It is important to note that what led [Whitten] to start carving wood was his interest in African art, not his interest in creating sculptures per se. Indeed, he took up wood carving specifically to better understand African art," notes Kelly Baum in her essay "Continental Drift: The Sculptures of Jack Whitten," in Siegel, *Odyssey: Jack Whitten Sculpture 1963-2017*, 142.
[67] Whitten, quoted in "Perspectives at the Blanton: Jack Whitten and Kellie Jones."
[68] Whitten, quoted in Olch Richards, "Oral History Interview with Jack Whitten 2009, Dec. 1-3."
[69] Whitten, quoted in Adriana Campbell, "Interviews: Jack Whitten," *Artforum Online*, 20 Oct. 2015, https://www.artforum.com/interviews/jack-whitten-talks-about-process-and-his-touring-retrospective-55689 (accessed on 15 July 2018).
[70] Whitten, "Why Do I Carve Wood?" in Sigel, *Odyssey: Jack Whitten Sculpture 1963-2017*, 36.
[71] See Siegel, *Odyssey: Jack Whitten Sculpture 1963-2017* and Siegel, *Jack Whitten: Notes from the Woodshed*, for a more expansive discussion of Whitten's sculpture practice.
[72] Whitten also attributes this change to the influence of his carpentry jobs, where he picked up new skills. The artist states, "My work became genuinely abstract in the late '60s. I was taking carpentry jobs, and I started working with some Italian plasterers, one of whom was a real master at reproducing the old-fashioned decorative molding you see in rooms. I was fascinated by his techniques and worked as closely with him as possible. My work just automatically changed because of this particular job. I built a platform on the floor of my studio and poured a ⅜-inch layer of acrylic paint which I worked with a rake. So my work in the '70s came out of a preoccupation with process, except for the geometry in the work, which was purely conceptual." Whitten, quoted in *Since the Harlem Renaissance: 50 Years of Afro-American Art*, 44.
[73] Whitten, quoted in Storr, "In Conversation: Jack Whitten with Robert Storr."
[74] Baum, "Continental Drift," in Siegel, *Odyssey: Jack Whitten Sculpture 1963-2017,* 145.
[75] "In 1970, I started making paintings with Afro combs and serrated tools. That was effective, so I built larger versions. The concept was pure systemic painting where the plane was compressed into a single gesture," notes Whitten in an *Artforum* interview with Adrianna Campbell. "After several experiments, I built what I called the Developer, an analogy to photography, which was meant to rebuke the notion of touch. At first it was a piece of two-by-four wood and later I attached a piece of thick neoprene rubber, which made it operate like a big squeegee, after which came a piece of sixteen-gauge sheet metal. When it got to be over twelve feet wide, I rigged it with wheels. Then with additional five- to ten-pound weighted metal rods, I could calculate pressure and figure out how much paint I wanted to remove." Whitten, quoted in Campbell, "Interviews: Jack Whitten." This statement contradicts the following statement included in the chronology comprised by Kellie Jones for Whitten's 1983 exhibition catalog which states, "1971: First uses sawblade and Afro-comb to pull through wet acrylic. This technique is a physical way of getting light into the painted surface without relying on the mixture of color." Kellie Jones, "Chronology," in Geldzahler, *Jack Whitten: Ten Years—1970-1980*, 15.

[76] In a 2015 conversation with Kellie Jones, Whitten reminisces on this period of artistic change and describes how he arrived at this new technique. The artist states, "So one day I had laid down one of these slabs and for some reason I pulled out my afro comb and said, 'look that's a pretty good tool!' And I start scratching through the slab. … I found that with the afro comb I could pick up the light that was down underneath the surface." Whitten, quoted in "Perspectives at the Blanton: Jack Whitten and Kellie Jones." In his essay, "Image That Comes Out of Matter," Richard Shiff describes Whitten's process in more detail: "During the 1970s, the instant of technological time was being appropriated not only by the action of cameras but also by the quick, single movement of the painter's "developer." Whitten's technical innovation remade photography as painting. The mechanical medium was reprocessed from the image *up*—from the distribution of matter already set beneath the titanium ground to the image revealed by the developer in a single stroke. Whitten inverted the photographic process, at least with respect to establishing a foundation for the image in matter before he developed it. In his painting, the development transforms the image; it becomes the image. As for the light, it shone from the paint outward as much as passing inward from the environment." Richard Shiff, *More Dimensions Than You Know Jack Whitten, Paintings 1979-1989: Jack Whitten, Paintings 1979-1989* (New York: Hauser & Wirth, 2017) 18.

[77] Whitten, quoted in Olch Richards, "Oral History Interview with Jack Whitten 2009, Dec. 1-3."

[78] Whitten, quoted in Earnest, "Art Conversation: Jack Whitten with Jarrett Earnest."

[79] The *Oxford English Dictionary Online* includes the following definition of totem as, "An emblem representing a clan or other hereditary social unit, having the form of an animal or other natural object; the animal or natural object itself; a depiction or representation of this animal or object." "Totem, n," *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, OED Third Edition, March, 2019, https://www-oed-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/view/Entry/203813?rskey=uZqEfc&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid (accessed on 16 Jul. 2019).

[80] Roberta Smith, "Revealing a Secret Art Life: A Painter's Sculptures," in *The New York Times*, 6 Sept. 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/06/arts/design/jack-whitten-review-met-breuer-sculpture.html (accessed on 10 Jul. 2019).

[81] *The Oxford English Dictionary Online* includes the following definition for memorial, "Preserving the memory of a person or thing; often applied to an object set up, or a festival (or the like) instituted, to commemorate an event or a person. Formerly with *of*." "Memorial, n," *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, OED Third Edition, June, 2001, https://www-oed-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/view/Entry/116351?rskey=0MVkqc&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid (accessed on 18 Jul. 2019).

[82] *Waiting'Til the Midnight Hour* provides an overview of the movement's evolution as it develops alongside the heroic period of the civil rights (1954-1965) and continues beyond Martin Luther King's assassination in 1968 well into the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s. Joseph expands the chronology for Black Power, tracing its roots to 1950s Harlem. Growing out of the black radical tradition and legacy of black freedom struggles, the Black Power Movement emerged in Harlem during a time in which it was saturated with radical ideologies including Communism, Socialism, Garveyism and Black Nationalism and coincided with global anti-imperialist struggles, the decolonization of Africa and the start of the modern civil rights era. Peniel Joseph, *Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America* (NY: Henry Holt and Company, 2006).

[83] Black Power manifested in manifold ways, depending on the needs of a local organization's constituents, including sometimes in the form of black nationalism (whether religious, cultural, political or economic) or Pan-Africanism (an anti-imperialist philosophy and a diasporic connection to Africa) or a combination thereof. "Maulana Karenga's division of black nationalism into religious nationalism (e.g., the NOI [Nation

of Islam]), political nationalists (e.g., the BPP [the Black Panther Party]), economic nationalists (e.g., the black cooperative movement), and cultural nationalists (e.g., Us) points out something of the complexity of nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s. Various other taxonomies of nationalism primarily rely on the binary of revolutionary nationalists and cultural nationalists (sometimes with a third category of territorial nationalists) that marked the terminology of the Black Power and Black Arts era." James Edward Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill, N.C., and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005) 16. Black Power organizations took on many forms where organizations employed Black Power's rhetoric—which was sometimes militant, in addition to revolutionary—or its flexible framework and tactics such as economic empowerment, institution and coalition building, self-defense, black electoral organizing, economic boycotts and other forms of political protest, to suit their respective needs to fight against racism and repression and promote community control and black agency. See: Joseph, *Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America*; Peniel Joseph, ed., *Neighborhood Rebels: Black Power at the Local Level* (NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010); Peniel Joseph, "The Black Power Movement: A Statement of the Field," *The Journal of American History* (Dec. 2009); Kwame Ture and Charles Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation* (NY: Vintage Books, 2011); Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin, Jr., *Black Against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016); Ashley Farmer, *Remaking Black Power: How Black Women Transformed an Era* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2017); and Tanisha C. Ford, *Liberated Threads: Black Women, Style, and the Global Politics of Soul* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

[84] George Yancy and Molefi Kete Asante, "The Stone, Molefi Kete Asante: Why Afrocentricity?" *The New York Times*, 7 May 2015, https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/05/07/molefi-kete-asante-why-afrocentricity/ (accessed on 25 Jul. 2019).

[85] Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s*, 14.

[86] Dawoud Bey, "The Black Artist as Invisible (Wo)Man," in Katy Siegel, *High Times, Hard Times: New York Painting 1967-1975* (New York: Independent Curators International and D.A.P/Distributed Art Publishers, 2006) 103.

[87] Leaders of the Black Arts Movement, such as cultural critics and playwrights Larry Neal and Amiri Baraka, stressed that Black artists had an obligation to their people to create politically engaged art that addressed the experiences of ordinary black individuals. According to Neal, The Black Arts Movement, "envisions an art that speaks directly to the needs and aspirations of Black America." Larry Neal, "The Black Arts Movement," in "Black Theater," *Drama Review,*12, no.4 (Summer, 1968) 29. Adherents of the Black Arts Movement advocated that art should be both for and about black people and should emphasize racial pride and uplift. As such, artists who adhered to the Black Arts Movement's standards viewed art as a vehicle to deliver social messaging and education. Accordingly, they believed that artists' work should be accessible so that all people regardless of their level of education, or economic means can understand, and hypothetically enjoy, the art's content. Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s*, 15.

[88] See examples: Imamu Amiri Baraka's 1972 album cover for *It's Nation Time: African Visionary Music*, reproduced in, Mark Godfrey and Zoe Whitley, *Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power* (London, England: Tate publishing, 2017) 37; and Askia Touré's *From the Pyramids to the Projects, From the Projects to the Stars* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1989).

[89] John F. Szwed, *Space Is the Place: The Lives and Times of Sun Ra* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1997) 64.

[90] Ibid.

[91] While a gesture to link people of African descent to a grand historical past, Richard Shiff brought to my attention the fact that slaves, we think, built the pyramids.
[92] (Deletions and emphasis in original). Whitten, quoted in Siegel, *Notes from the Woodshed*, 121-122.
[93] See: Siegel, *Jack Whitten: Notes from the Woodshed*; Wright, *Jack Whitten*; Ian Forester, "Resisting Dichotomies & Compressing Complexity," *Art21*, October 2017, https://art21.org/read/jack-whitten-resisting-dichotomies-compressing-complexity/; Siegel, *Odyssey: Jack Whitten Sculpture 1963-2017*; Earnest, "Art Conversation: Jack Whitten with Jarrett Earnest."
[94] Whitten, quoted in Wright, *Jack Whitten*, 8.
[95] Ibid.
[96] On March 14, 1980, Whitten made a note in his studio log, stating, "My work does not fit into the present category of Black Art." Whitten, quoted in Siegel, *Jack Whitten: Notes from the Woodshed*, 161.
[97] Ian Bourland, "Jack Whitten (1939-2018)," *Frieze Magazine Online,* published on 24 Jan. 2018, https://frieze.com/article/jack-whitten-1939-2018 (accessed on 27 May 2019).
[98] Curator Lowery Stokes Sims contextualizes varying opinions of what Black artists 'should' be doing during the period of the BAM. She states, "There seemed to be this question about what black artists were supposed to do and how they could be relevant. And I think that there were very strong delineations, which subsequently disappeared a decade later, between whether you were figurative and "blackstream" [i.e., creating specifically black subject matter] or you were abstract and "mainstream." There was always the assumption that if you were abstract you were not being relevant to your community, that you were just a sellout to the white world, that if you wanted to be a down, relevant black person you did figurative art that had polemical content. Of course, these were broad generalizations, but there were people who had very strong ideas about this." Lowery Stokes Sims, quoted in "Black Artists and Abstraction: A Roundtable," in Kellie Jones, *Energy Experimentation: Black Artists and Abstraction 1964-1980* (Harlem, NY: Studio Museum, 2005) 112; Whitten also notes, "A lot of people accept the fact that as long as there are black faces screaming on a canvas and it deals with social issues, then that's black art. I don't accept that." Whitten, quoted in *Since the Harlem Renaissance: 50 Years of Afro-American Art*, 46.
[99] According to Mark Godfrey and Zoe Whitley, "Bowling wanted to speak for Black artists who were not restricted in their practices by 'the current abstractions of politics and sociology.' For him 'Black art' involved 'an awareness of the solid canons of traditional African artistic expression and thought,' and the ability to 'rearrange found things, redirecting the "things" of whatever environment in which Blacks are thrown, placed or trapped.'" Frank Bowling, "Notes from a Work in Progress," in *5+1*, exh. cat. (Stony Brook, NY: Art Gallery State University of New York at Stony Brook, 1969) n.p., quoted in Godfrey and Whitley, *Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power,* 84.
[100] See Margo Natalie Crawford, *Black Post-Blackness: The Black Arts Movement and Twenty-First Century-Aesthetics* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2017). Regarding Margo Natalie Crawford's position, Professor Eddie Chambers notes, "Crawford fervently believes that experimentation was at the heart of the BAM and to suggest otherwise is for her a caricature." Correspondence with the author, 4 Nov. 2019.
[101] This part of the oral history interview for the Archives of American Art gives context to what it was like to be a black artist working in abstraction in the 1970s. Judith Olch Richards states, "In the '70s, you're working in this purely abstract, nonobjective vein. At that time, what was the political reality that you felt in terms of being a black artist working non-objectively?" Whitten responds, "Oh that was severe, severe in the sense that you couldn't get [any] action either from the black community or the white community. The idea of a black abstract artist doing those works and thinking that way, nobody paid attention to you. From their point of view, that is the white community, they would just say, ah, they're aping white artists and that

was it. Nobody paid any attention to you. And from the black community, oh they're not doing black art and they're not dealing with black people so why bother? So if you look at it politically, you're caught between a rock and a hard place. So once you realize that, you have to make very strong decisions and you have to develop your own agenda about who you are and what you're doing. So I've known from the beginning [that] my whole agenda was always painting." Olch Richards and Whitten, quoted in Olch Richards, "Oral History Interview with Jack Whitten 2009, Dec. 1-3."

[102] "In the Black Nationalist atmosphere of this period, many of these artists were rejected by more militant practitioners and institutions that believed figuration was a more useful way to combat centuries of derogatory imagery centered on people of African descent. Abstraction was characterized as "white art in blackface," but without the subjects and artifacts of colonialism—the people and art of the Americas, Africa and Oceania—where would Picasso (or Matisse, etc.) or their heirs really be?," remarks Kellie Jones in her essay, "To the Max: Energy and Experimentation," in Jones, *Energy Experimentation: Black Artists and Abstraction 1964-1980,* 15.

[103] In "Jack Whitten: An African-American and Pollock," Whitten states: "My African-American identity shaped by the politics of racism in America makes it extremely difficult for me to experience the leisure of being apolitical. Every artist recognizes the "immediateness" of being apolitical as a selfish narcissistic defense mechanism. It is an existentialist right to reject the world in order to commune with self. History has proven that the apolitical is a dangerous political choice and that there is a price to pay under certain circumstances." Whitten, quoted in Siegel, *Painting After Pollock*, 143.

[104] Whitten, quoted in Siegel, *Jack Whitten: Notes from the Woodshed*, 192.

[105] Whitten, quoted in DeBarry, "An Interview with Artist Jack Whitten."

[106] Whitten, quoted in Earnest, "Art Conversation: Jack Whitten with Jarrett Earnest."

[107] In a February 2008 studio log entry Whitten states, "Compression is the key word for me. The information is compressed into matter." Whitten, quoted in Siegel, *Jack Whitten: Notes from the Woodshed,* 313.

[108] Ibid., 268.

[109] (Emphasis original). Ibid., 346. See also, "Jack Whitten: An African-American and Pollock," in Siegel, *Painting After Pollock: Structures of Influence*, particularly page 134.

[110] Ruminating on the notion of 'compression' in a March 2007 studio log entry Whitten states, "The essence of flatness is COMPRESSION. Physical properties along with its psychological implications is compressed into the skin of paint. The painting as object is skin and only skin. The stretcher bar or any other support is a separate entity; including its depth i.e., thickness of bar or configuration of shape is NO issue in paintings' three-dimensionality. Everything is located within the skin..Space is already built into matter." Whitten, quoted in Siegel, *Jack Whitten: Notes from the Woodshed*, 296. (Emphasis original).

[111] (Emphasis original). Ibid., 116.

[112] Ibid.

[113] Ibid., 9-10.

[114] (Emphasis original). Ibid., 437.

[115] Afrofuturism was coined by cultural critic Mark Dery in his 1994 essay, "Black to the Future." Dery refers to Afrofuturism as, "Speculative fiction that treats African-American themes and addresses African-American concerns in the context of the twentieth-century technoculture—and, more generally, African-American signification that appropriates images of technology and a prosthetically enhanced future—might, for want of a better term, be called "Afrofuturism."" Mark Dery, "Black to the Future: Interviews with Samuel R. Delaney, Greg Tate, and Tricia Rose," in *Flame Wars: The Discourse of Cyberculture,* ed., Mark Dery (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1994) 180. Afrofuturism can also be broadly defined as

"African American voices" with "other stories to tell about culture, technology, and things to come," according to Alondra Nelson, who cites Dery, in her introduction to *Future Texts*. Mark Dery, quoted in Alondra Nelson, "Introduction: Future Texts," *Social Text* 71, vol. 20, no. 2, (summer 2002) (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press) 9.

[116] Egypt's presence is evident in Sun Ra's album covers which often featured pyramids, and his musical collective, the Arkestra's song titles, such as "Egyptian Fantasy," "Pharaoh's Den," "Pre-Egyptian March," "Pyramids," "Sunset on the Nile," "Tiny Pyramids," among others. Biographer John F. Szwed cites the African and Egyptian influence in Ra's song titles. He states, "But by and large Sonny's titles were programmatic in the grand sense of the word, and his compositions which referred to Egypt, Africa, and the ancient world sought an exotic change of place." Szwed, *Space Is the Place: The Lives and Times of Sun Ra*, 125. Sun Ra evidently wore a "skull cap emblazoned with occult symbols," according to his biographer. Ibid., 183. Sun Ra (formerly Herman Poole Blount), changed his name to Le Sony'r Ra and then shortened it to Sun Ra. Ibid., 4. Ra's infatuation with Egypt was also reflected in his personal styling and the costume choices that members of his band donned for performances, which often featured Egyptian headdresses. Even the origins of his adopted name derived from Egypt as Ra referred to the Egyptian God of the Sun, for whom he felt a special affinity.

[117] Jack Whitten, "Five Lines, Four Spaces," in Bennett Simpson, ed., *Blues for Smoke* (Los Angeles, CA: Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, and Prestel, 2012) 148.

[118] Whitten, quoted in Campbell, "Interviews: Jack Whitten."

[119] Ibid., 184.

[120] Ra read the popular books by Sir E.A.Wallis Budge: *The Egyptian Book of the Dead, Osiris and the Egyptian Resurrection*, and the *Egyptian Hieroglyphic Dictionary*, the latter of which particularly interested him as he believed that, like the pyramids and other monuments, hieroglyphics held the secrets of ancient civilizations, which informed his knowledge of Egyptian culture and history. Szwed, *Space Is the Place: The Lives and Times of Sun Ra,* 65.

[121] Ruth La Ferla, "Afrofuturism: The Next Generation," *The New York Times*, 12 Dec. 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/12/fashion/afrofuturism-the-next-generation.html (accessed on 27 Jul. 2019).

[122] Szwed, *Space Is the Place: The Lives and Times of Sun Ra,*106.

[123] Ibid., 126.

[124] Whitten, quoted in Siegel, *Jack Whitten: Notes from the Woodshed*, 99.

[125] Mirsini Whitten-Amidon, Email exchange with the author, 2 Oct. 2018.

[126] See chapters 10 and 11, "The Chickens Coming Home to Roost," and "An Epiphany in the Hajj," in Manning Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2011).

[127]According to Malcolm X, "The pilgrimage to Mecca, known as the Hajj, is a religious obligation that every orthodox Muslim fulfills, if humanly able, at least once in his or her lifetime." Malcolm X, quoted in Malcolm X and Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X as Told to Alex Haley* (New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 2015) 325. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X as Told to Alex Haley* was originally published by Grove Press in 1965.

[128] Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention,* 361-362.

[129] Malcolm X quoted in Ibid., 365.

[130] "The essential tenets for the Nation's religious remapping of the world rested on Yacub's History—that whites were the devil, that Wallace D. Fard Muhammad was God in person, and that Elijah Muhammad had indeed been chosen by that God to represent his interests on earth." Ibid., 285.

[131] M.S. Handler, "Introduction," in X and Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X as Told to Alex Haley*, xxvii.
[132] "The truth," X said, "is that "integration" is an *image*, it's a foxy Northern liberal's smokescreen that confuses the true wants of the American black man. Here in these fifty racist and neo-racist states of North America, this word "integration" has millions of white people confused, and angry, believing wrongly that the black masses want to live mixed up with the white man." Malcolm X, quoted in X and Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X as Told to Alex Haley*, 277.
[133] Malcolm X, quoted in Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention,* 228.
[134] Ibid., 194.
[135] Leaders of the Civil Rights Movement, especially the black clergy, were obvious targets. According to Handler, X "denounced Christianity as a religion designed for slaves," and thought of "the Negro clergy as the curse of the black man." Handler, quoted in X and Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X as Told to Alex Haley*, xxvii.
[136] In his biography of Malcolm X, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*, historian Manning Marable argues that X first had a revelation about race on his 1959 trip to the Middle East, but as we was still loyal to Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam at the time, he suppressed these new ideas as they were antithetical to the separatist teachings of Elijah Muhammad. Marable states, "Malcolm's letter [a letter X wrote home about his experiences in the Middle East and Africa], filled with new ideas about Islam [where he said, "there is no color prejudice among Moslems, for Islam teaches that all mortals are equals and brothers"] and Afro-Asian solidarity, found him at a philosophical crossroads. The attitudes toward race expressed by Muslims he encountered on his trip had revealed to him fundamental contradictions within NOI theology. Islam was in theory colorblind; members of the *ummah* cold be any nationality or race, so long as they practiced the five pillars and other essential traditions. Whites could not be categorically demonized." Marable continues, "Perhaps because the trip marked the beginning of Malcolm's private concerns with the NOI's organization, he was virtually silent about it in the *Autobiography*. He could obviously see the discrepancies between what he had been taught by Elijah Muhammad compared to the richly diverse cultures that he had observed. All Muslims clearly were not "black." Malcom's letter to the Pittsburgh Courier, however, as well as stories he recalled of his experiences, conveyed how vividly the trip impressed itself on his mind. Its lessons continued to be heard in the developing philosophy that he expressed through his public speeches." Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention,* 167-168.
[137] Malcolm X, quoted in X and Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X as Told to Alex Haley*, 340.
[138] Ibid., 347.
[139] Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention,* 229.
[140] Grace Lee Boggs, quoted in Ibid.*,* 265.
[141] Ibid.*,* 360.
[142] Ibid., 285.
[143] Jones, *Energy Experimentation: Black Artists and Abstraction 1964-1980,* 31.
[144] Whitten, quoted in "Perspectives at the Blanton: Jack Whitten and Kellie Jones."
[145] Though he discarded the process he used in *Homage to Malcolm* (1970)s—in which he used tools to drag layers of liquid paint across the canvas, revealing the light trapped underneath its surface—Whitten kept pursuing the notion of the slab and continued his long-term investigation into his preferred medium's material possibilities. Looking to capture the materiality of his lived environment, Whitten discovered that he could use plaster to cast molds that he then filled with acrylic to create pieces of paint—tangible objects—that retained the material qualities of the things he looked to replicate. These hand-held acrylic casts, or "skins," as the artist called them, became the building blocks for Whitten's paintings of the late

1980s, which he would adhere to the canvas to create collages "made of and from paint," as Kathryn Kanjo puts it. This technique is first exemplified in Whitten's series of *Site* paintings from the 1980s. In the early 1990s, Whitten further developed his process as he explored a different direction within the paint as collage framework. Whitten, quoted in Olch Richards, "Oral History Interview with Jack Whitten 2009, Dec. 1-3," and Kanjo, *Jack Whitten: Five Decades of Painting*, 33. In "Jack Whitten: An African-American and Pollock," the painter states: "In 1990 I did the first of those digital abstract paintings in the form of little pixels cut from acrylic." Whitten, quoted in Siegel, *Painting After Pollock*, 138.

[146] In his studio log dated December 13, 2012 Whitten writes, "BY THE WAY—ALL OF MY MEMORIAL PAINTINGS ARE GIFTS TO THE PEOPLE THAT INSPIRED THEM...THEY ARE NOT MERE DEDICATIONS...THEY ARE GIFTS." (Emphasis original). Whitten, quoted in Siegel, *Jack Whitten: Notes from the Woodshed*, 418.

[147] Whitten, quoted in "Perspectives at the Blanton: Jack Whitten and Kellie Jones."

[148] Baum states, "Here Whitten concretizes Glissant's theory of *créolisation*, triangulating form, matter, and subject." Kelly Baum, "Plate 52, *Atopolis: For Édouard Glissant*, 2014," in Siegel, *Odyssey: Jack Whitten Sculpture 1963-2017*, 132.

[149] Raymond states, "This concept of a non-place fits or was echoed or mirrored in the writings of Édouard Glissant and I think that is the reason why Jack dedicated this painting to him is that Glissant invented many terms, one of them was the whole world." Yasmil Raymond, "#ArtSpeaks: Yasmil Raymond on Jack Whitten," video, Museum of Modern Art, New York, Facebook page, https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=10156250559637281 (accessed on 19 Aug. 2019).

[150] Born in Martinique, Glissant was one of the most significant postcolonial theorists of the post-World War II era, whose works often addressed the implications of colonialism, racism, slavery, and the African diaspora.

[151] Whitten was friendly with Glissant, whom he met through his friends and fellow artists Melvin Edwards and Jayne Cortez, who were close with Glissant. Whitten recalls, "I got back to New York and I realized I knew this man. He was a friend of Jayne's a dear friend of Jayne's and Mel's and I had met him several times in New York-having dinner with him and hanging out and so forth. And when I read his books for the first time, it occurred to me, I know the man, why is it that I never read the books?" Whitten, quoted in "Perspectives at the Blanton: Jack Whitten and Kellie Jones." "In *Poetics of Relation*, French-Caribbean writer and philosopher Édouard Glissant turns the concrete particulars of Caribbean reality into a complex, energetic vision of a world in transformation. He sees the islands of the Antilles as enduring an "invalid" suffering imposed by history, yet also as a place whose unique interactions will one day produce an emerging global consensus. Arguing that the writer alone can tap the unconscious of a people and apprehend its multiform culture in order to provide forms of memory and intent capable of transcending "nonhistory," Glissant therefore defines his "poetics of relation"—both aesthetic and political—as a transformative mode of history, capable of enunciating and making concrete a French-Caribbean reality with a self-defined past and future. In *Poetics of Relation*, we come to see that relation in all its senses—telling, listening, connecting, and the parallel consciousness of self and surroundings—is the key to transforming mentalities and reshaping societies. The issues raised about identity as built in relation and not in isolation are central to current discussions not only of Caribbean creolization but of U.S. multiculturalism as well." Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 1990, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1997) back cover.

[152] Whitten states, "Dirk from the Museum of Contemporary Art in Brussels, Dirk Snauwaert, invited me to participate. I met Dirk at the museum in Belgium in Brussels and he says to me, 'you must read Édouard

Glissant's work.' That's how he said it. He said not you'd be interested, he said you must read. And I hadn't read his work." Whitten, quoted in "Perspectives at the Blanton: Jack Whitten and Kellie Jones."

[153] The exhibition *Atopolis*, curated by Dirk Snauwaert and co-curated by Charlotte Frilling—who commissioned Whitten's painting—was organized by Wiels, Brussels in collaboration with Mons 2015 - Europen Capital of Culture in celebration of the city of Mons being selected as the European Capital of Culture. It was mounted at the Manège de Sury, Mons, Belgium from June to October 2015. "Atopolis-Wiels @Mons2015," *Wiels*, http://www.wiels.org/en/exhibitions/683/atopolis---wiels--mons2015 (accessed on 7 Sept. 2019).

[154] Whitten states, "Dirk came up with the term 'Atopolis' and it's taken from the works of Glissant. In truth, it comes from one of his major works *Tut Monde*." Whitten, quoted in "Perspectives at the Blanton: Jack Whitten and Kellie Jones."

[155] Dirk Snauweart and Charlotte Frilling, "Introduction," in, Raphael Pirenne, ed., *Atopolis (*Bruxelles: Wiels, 2015) 16-17.

[156] Whitten states, "I have a background in Greek. I speak Greek. I've lived in Greece on the island of Crete for forty years. The world interests me." Whitten, quoted in "Perspectives at the Blanton: Jack Whitten and Kellie Jones." In reference to returning from his first visit to Greece, Whitten states, "I came back to New York and I started studying Greek at the New School, had private instructors." Whitten, quoted in Olch Richards, "Oral History Interview with Jack Whitten 2009, Dec. 1-3."

[157] Whitten, quoted in "Perspectives at the Blanton: Jack Whitten and Kellie Jones." According to *The Oxford English Dictionary Online*, the etymology of both 'topos' and "polis," is Greek whereby "topos" is understood as "place," and "polis," as city. "Topos (n)," *The Oxford English Dictionary Online*, *OED* 1986, https://www-oed-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/view/Entry/203433?redirectedFrom=topos#eid (accessed on 15 Sept. 2019) where 'polis," is defined as, "A Greek city-state; *spec*. such a state considered in its ideal form. More generally: the state, the body politic." "Polis, n.2," *The Oxford English Dictionary Online*, *OED Third Edition*, September 2006, https://www-oed-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/view/Entry/146859?rskey=rEnJnY&result=2&isAdvanced=false#eid (accessed on 18 Sept. 2019). "A" in this context seems to be functioning as "without."

[158] Glissant, "Relation," in, *Poetics of Relation*, 131. In the glossary for *Poetics of Relation*, Betsy Wing defines laghia as, "a traditional dance that takes the form of a battle." Wing, "Glossary," in Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, xxii.

[159] Of *creolization*, Glissant says: "It is not merely an encounter, a shock (in Segalen's sense), a *métissage,* but a new and original dimension allowing each person to be there and elsewhere, rooted and open, lost in the mountains and free beneath the sea, in harmony and in errantry." Ibid., 34. In "Creolizations," he elaborates on this notion writing: Creolization, one of the ways of forming a complex mix—and not merely a linguistic result—is only exemplified by its processes and certainly not by the "contents" on which these operate...We are not prompted solely by the defining of our identities but by their relation to everything possible as well—the mutual mutations generated by this interplay of relations. Creolizations bring into Relation but not to universalize…" Glissant, "Creolizations," in, *Poetics of Relation*, 89. Glissant speaks of *métissage* as, "the meeting and synthesis of two differences," where he posits creolization as a limitless *métissage*." Glissant, "Poetics," in Ibid., 34. Emphasizing the context of Glissant's use of the term *métissage,* translator Betsy Wing states, "A word whose primary use describes the racial intermixing within a colony and its contemporary aftermath but which Glissant uses especially to affirm the multiplicity and diversity of beings in Relation." Wing, "Translator's Introduction," in Ibid., xviii. Wing also notes, "Following Fraçoise Lionnet's fine analysis of métissage (*Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender, Self-Portraiture* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989], 1-29), I have chosen to retain the French term here.

The word has a wide range of culturally specific meanings, all value laden. Most English translations, such as *cross-breeding* and *mongrelization*, bear a negative value. (The product, *métis*, is a "half-breed, etc.") *Crossing, braiding,* and *intermixing* are perhaps the most neutral but ignore the problematics of racial difference. *Creolization* works but limits *métissage* to a cultural context. For Glissant, *métissage* moves from a narrow range of racial intermixing to become a relational practice affirming the multiplicity and diversity of its components. Trans." Wing, "Notes: Poetics," in Ibid., 214.

[160] Wing, "Translator's Introduction," in Ibid., xi-xxiii.

[161] Whitten, quoted in Olch Richards, "Oral History Interview with Jack Whitten 2009, Dec. 1-3."

[162] In a studio log entry from October 5, 2007 Whitten further elaborates on his process explaining: "My ~~pre~~-methodology of making a painting consist of three separate processed:
CONSTRUCTION—DECONSTRUCTION—RECONSTRUCTION
The first process of construct is the most difficult + the most mysterious: the subject must be translated ~~into matter via~~ metaphysically ~~transportation~~ into matter. ~~is the most difficult~~ Deconstruction is a manual process which involve any number of procedures which may include heat (both dry + wet), cold (freeze), grinding, sanding cutting ~~breaking into tesserae~~. Reconstruction is the ~~lamination~~ process of ~~choosing~~ selecting + laminating the acrylic tesserae onto canvas as acrylic paint collage." (Emphasis, deletions, and misspelling is original). Whitten, quoted in Siegel, *Jack Whitten: Notes from the Woodshed,* 300.

[163] In his essay "The Relative and Chaos," Glissant notes, "Relation, or totality in evolution, whose order is continually in flux and whose disorder one can imagine forever." Glissant, "The Relative and Chaos," in, Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 133.

[164] Studio log entry dated March 25, 2010. (Emphasis original). Whitten, quoted in Sigel, *Jack Whitten: Notes from the Woodshed*, 389.

[165] Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, back cover.

[166] Glissant, "Distancing, Determining," Ibid., 144.

[167] Hans Ulrich Obrist, Gabriela Rangel and Asad Raza, "Trembling Thinking, or Ethnography of the Unknowable," in Hans Ulrich Obrist, Gabriela Rangel and Asad Raza, *Lydia Cabrera and Édouard Glissant: Trembling Thinking* (New York: Americas Society, 2019) 25.

[168] Studio log entry dated November 26, 2012. (Emphasis original). Whitten, quoted in Siegel, *Jack Whitten: Notes from the Woodshed*, 413.

[169] Whitten, quoted in Siegel, "Polytropos," *Odyssey: Jack Whitten Sculpture 1963-2017,* 26. This quote is cited as footnote 45, on p. 27: "Whitten, logbook, May 1975." This entry is not included in *Jack Whitten: Notes from the Woodshed*. As the editor, Siegel had access to Whitten's studio log and selected specific entries for inclusion. (Emphasis with the ellipsis is original).

[170] Translator Betsy Wing clarifies the English translation of errance to errantry, stating, "Here Glissant stresses overtones of scared mission rather than aimless wandering; *errance*, its ending linked for the contemporary reader with deconstruction's validation of *différance*, deflects the negative associations between *errer* (to wander) and *erreur* (error). Wing, "Introduction," in Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, xv-xvi.

[171] Ibid., "Introduction," in Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, xvi.

[172] As he describes in his studio log, Whitten valued travel—believing that it was important for people, especially black artists, to expand their horizons—and relished the opportunity to experience and engage with other cultures and people of different backgrounds. In 1985 Whitten remarked, "I think the big mistake that black artists in general make is that their work is too limited. They're not dealing with art on a global scale. They tend to look at art as limited to a closed community. My advice would be for all blacks, not just artists, to travel. If I had a lot of money I would set up a foundation for young blacks to travel just

to get them outside of what they know of America. When they return, they would find that what they've confronted in the States is a very small thing in relation to the whole world view." Whitten, quoted in *Since the Harlem Renaissance: 50 Years of Afro-American Art,* 45.

[173] In his American Archives of American Art interview with Judith Olch Richards, Richards says to Whitten, "I didn't ask if you have you done any other traveling that was meaningful to you." Whitten responds: "Oh, God yes." Richard in turn asks: "That impacted your work?" To which Whitten remarks: Oh man, man, man, man," and proceeds to describe an impactful trip he took to Egypt where he visited St. Catherine's in Mount Sinai. Whitten and Richards, quoted in Olch Richards, "Oral History Interview with Jack Whitten 2009, Dec. 1-3."

[174] The inclusion of "[work]" is not original to Baum's thought, as it was substituted for the word 'sculpture,' but regardless of the word choice, the idea remains the same. Baum, "Continental Drift: The Sculptures of Jack Whitten," in Siegel, *Odyssey: Jack Whitten Sculpture 1963-2017*, 143.

[175] Richard Shiff brought this alternate idea to my attention, "We could also argue that he had multiple static identifications with the places he habitually returned to." Correspondence with the author, 21 Oct. 2019.

[176] Glissant, "Distancing, Determining," in, Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 143.

[177] Ibid.

[178] Ibid., 144.

[179] Whitten, quoted in "The Art of Jack Whitten," Forum Lectures, *Forum Network*.

[180] Jack Whitten, "The Refactoring of Painting: A Talk by Jack Whitten," *Black Renaissance* 16, no. 2 (Fall 2016), https://view.joomag.com/nyu-black-renaissance-noire-nyu-black-renaissance-noire-volume-162-fall-2016/0455932001485115354# (accessed on 27 May 2019).

[181] Studio log entry dated September 24, 2009. Whitten, quoted in Siegel, *Jack Whitten: Notes from the Woodshed*, 346.

[182] Whitten, quoted in Earnest, "Art Conversation: Jack Whitten with Jarrett Earnest."

[183] Whitten, quoted in Olch Richards, "Oral History Interview with Jack Whitten 2009, Dec. 1-3."

[184] In an interview with Jarrett Earnest, Whitten explains the direct method, stating: "The technique I'm using in these paintings goes back to ancient mosaics, what we call *direct method.* The direct method used pieces of stone, marble, precious metal or glass—which are called *tesserae*—…" Whitten, quoted in Earnest, "Art Conversation: Jack Whitten with Jarrett Earnest."

[185] Whitten, quoted in Robert Storr, "In Conversation with Jack Whitten," in Kanjo, *Jack Whitten: Five Decades of Painting*, 63.

[186] Whitten, quoted in Earnest, "Art Conversation: Jack Whitten with Jarrett Earnest."

[187] Ibid.

[188] Whitten, quoted in Robert Storr, "In Conversation with Jack Whitten," in Kanjo, *Jack Whitten: Five Decades of Painting*, 63.

[189] Whitten, quoted in "Perspectives at the Blanton: Jack Whitten and Kellie Jones."

[190] Ibid.

[191] Ibid.

[192] Studio log entry dated December 4, 2007. Whitten, quoted in Robert Storr, "In Conversation with Jack Whitten," in Kanjo, *Jack Whitten: Five Decades of Painting*, 63.

[193] Shiff, *More Dimensions Than You Know Jack Whitten, Paintings 1979-1989*, 10.

[194] This belief was in part informed by Whitten's experience with the Xerox Corporation in 1974. Whitten states, "These Xerox experiments and my involvement with tool making profoundly influenced my thinking about painting…" Whitten, quoted in Siegel, *Painting After Pollock*, 132.

[195] Studio log entry dated March 22, 2010. Whitten, quoted in Siegel, *Jack Whitten: Notes from the Woodshed,* 358.
[196] Shiff, *More Dimensions Than You Know Jack Whitten, Paintings 1979-1989*, 12.
[197] Whitten, quoted in Siegel, *Painting After Pollock,* 132-133.
[198] Ibid., 133.
[199] Whitten, quoted in Shiff, *More Dimensions Than You Know Jack Whitten, Paintings 1979-1989*, 11. Shiff cites this quote as, "Whitten, studio note, April 9, 1988."
[200] Ibid., 10.
[201] Ibid.
[202] Whitten, quoted in Ibid., 5. Shiff cites this quote as, "January 22, 1986." The quote was sourced from Whitten's studio logs, which Shiff had access to, however this entry was not reproduced in *Jack Whitten: Notes from the Woodshed*.
[203] Studio note dated January 25, 1988. Whitten, quoted in Siegel, *Jack Whitten: Notes from the Woodshed,* 195.
[204] Whitten, quoted in Siegel, *Painting After Pollock,* 139.
[205] "Soul, n." *OED Online*, Mar. 2018, Oxford University Press, http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/view/Entry/185083?rskey=6KP3u7&result=1 (accessed May 03, 2018).
[206] Whitten, quoted in Shiff, *More Dimensions Than You Know Jack Whitten, Paintings 1979-1989*, 15. The quote's origin is Siegel, *Painting After Pollock,* 139-140.
[207] Studio note dated April 27, 1987. Whitten, quoted in Ibid., 15.
[208] Ibid., 24.
[209] Whitten, quoted in Storr, "In Conversation with Jack Whitten," in Kanjo, *Jack Whitten: Five Decades of Painting*, 53-54.
[210] Whitten, quoted in Kenneth Goldsmith, "Jack Whitten," *Bomb* 48 (summer 1994), https://bombmagazine.org/articles/jack-whitten/ (accessed on 3 Mar. 2018) 38.
[211] Ibid.
[212] Whitten, quoted in Geldzahler, 8.
[213] Ibid.
[214] Shiff, *More Dimensions Than You Know Jack Whitten, Paintings 1979-1989, Paintings 1979-1989*, 24.
[215] Ibid.
[216] Studio note dated December 4, 2007. Whitten, quoted in Siegel, *Jack Whitten: Notes from the Woodshed,* 305.
[217] Studio note dated January 12, 2008. Ibid. 306-307. (Emphasis original).
[218] Whitten's approach to memorializing Jordan by imbuing her spirit into the paint was not based in religious beliefs or mystical tradition, Whitten said. It was "simply a way of working. "I don't see this as anything corny. I just see a work procedure." He does, however, recognize that this idea of conjuring and working with spirit comes out of his upbringing in the southern fundamentalist church, remarking that, "certain people existed as a spirit and energy." Whitten, quoted in Siegel, *Painting After Pollock*, 140-141.
[219] Richard Shiff, "The Art and Wisdom of Jack Whitten," *Apollo Magazine Online*, 20 Jan. 2018, https://www.apollo-magazine.com/the-art-and-wisdom-of-jack-whitten/ (accessed on 22 March 2018).
[220] Ibid.
[221] Whitten, quoted in Siegel, *Jack Whitten: Notes from the Woodshed*, 181.
[222] Thomas J. Lax, "From New York, Southward: A Counter-Memorial," in *Mousse Magazine*, no. 44 (Summer, 2014) 230-233.

[223] James E. Young, "The Counter-Monument: Memory Against Itself in Germany Today," in *Critical Inquiry*, 18, no. 2 (Winter, 1992) 271-272.
[224] Whitten, quoted in Shiff, *More Dimensions Than You Know Jack Whitten, Paintings 1979-1989*, 15. Shiff cites this quote as Whitten, "Beyond Abstraction," unpublished text, September 2015.
[225] Studio note dated October 5, 2007. Whitten, quoted in Siegel, *Jack Whitten: Notes from the Woodshed*, 300-301. (Emphasis original--if it were to have been edited, the correct word would be 'too.')
[226] Studio note dated September 24, 1994. Ibid., 230. (Emphasis original--if it were to have been edited, it should have read 'it's').
[227] Studio noted dated October 5, 2007. Ibid., 302-303.
[228] Studio note dated February 3, 1996. Ibid., 240.
[229] Studio note dated October 24, 1988. Ibid., 196. (Original emphasis--if it would have been edited, it would read 'REFLECTS').
[230] Studio note dated February 24, 1996. Ibid., 241.
[231] Whitten, "Why Do I Carve Wood," in Siegel, *Odyssey: Jack Whitten Sculpture 1963-2017*, 37.
[232] Studio note dated March 2, 2009. Whitten, quoted in Siegel, *Jack Whitten: Notes from the Woodshed*, 332. (Original emphasis. If the quote were to have been edited, 'constitute' should be changed to 'constitutes.').

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